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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

A QUEER PERFORMANCE OF GENDER:
Sexuality, Identity and Lesbian Representational Politics

BY

© JEAN NOBLE

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall, 1993

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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled A QUEER PERFORMANCE OF GENDER: SEXUALITY, IDENTITY AND LESBIAN REPRESENTATIONAL POLITICS, submitted by JEAN NOBLE in partial fulfillment for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

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1 September 1993

for brass

ABSTRACT

This thesis accounts for the importance of the recent lesbian-feminist "sex wars" to feminist and queer theory's revaluation of second wave feminist identity politics. The term "sex wars" encompasses a series of public debates or disagreements about the nature of sexuality, the modes of its representations and its place in women's lives. I argue that the sex wars represent a moral panic, in which widespread sexual fears and anxieties are displaced from the "real causes" of the problems onto "folk devils" or an identified social group. That group in this instance is s/m lesbians and so-called "sex radicals." I argue that the "real causes" of the current moral panic are the concepts of identity produced by texts such as the 1970 essay by the Radicalesbians titled, "The Woman-Identified Woman," which desexualize lesbianism and ground lesbian identity in biologically determined and essentialist notions of gender. As such, the sex wars can be read as the eruption of the contradictions and tensions of that identity.

Two recent lesbian texts, Sarah Schulman's Empathy and Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza destabilize that regulatory identity and enact, via an oppositional consciousness, what Judith Butler has called a provisional lesbian identity. These texts deconstruct the subject of second wave lesbian-feminist identity politics by deploying the excess of that category against the category itself. Anzaldúa challenges the colour blindness of identity politics, while Schulman's post-Freudian novel explores fluid and shifting identities marked by multiple gender identifications. Both texts expose identity as an unstable fiction and as a performatively produced fabrication.

Two collections of lesbian "pornography" are re-eroticizing lesbian identity by parodying both the conventions of heterosexual pornography and the discourses of cultural feminism which previously condemned lesbian "sex cultures" as "male-identified." Della Grace's Love Bites and Kiss and Tell's Drawing the Line deploy tropes of lesbianism as gender transitive to "trouble" and denaturalize sexual identity. Lesbian pornography participates in what Foucault has called "the modern compulsion to speak incessantly about sex;" however, lesbian pornography "troubles" the phallic claims to truth in heterosexual pornography and "speaks" the conditions of representation themselves. Lesbian pornography puts the political and discursive economies which produced it as their necessary "Other" "unblushingly on display," in order to jam the "theoretical machinery itself, suspending its pretension to the production of truth." The result is a very different and hybridized sexual economy and provisional identity.

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A QUEER PERFORMANCE OF GENDER: Sexuality, Identity and Lesbian Representational Politics[1]

Introduction

While I was in Vancouver in 1987 during some of the festivities of that year's International Lesbian Week, an incident occurred that changed my thinking about sex, gender and identity. The local gay and lesbian newspaper Angles published a poster created by Li Yeun to celebrate and advertise International Lesbian Week (September 1987). The poster featured fifteen photographs of lesbians having sex, and created intense controversy upon publication. Many strands of the gay, feminist and lesbian communities celebrated the arrival of the poster as long overdue. At the same time, many gay-owned businesses refused to carry that particular issue of Angles, condemning the poster as pornographic and offensive. Many other businesses permanently cancelled advertising contracts with the paper, while others again praised the editorial staff for finally taking political risks with increased lesbian content.

Since then, a number of events and publications across the country have explored or celebrated lesbian sex. Gay and lesbian magazines across Canada (including Vancouver's Angles and the now defunct Diversity: The Lesbian Rag, and

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[1]My thanks to Brenda Brown, Debra Shogan, Gloria Filax, Julie, Cheryl Malmo and members of Edmonton's own "Shake that Body" Queer Theory Reading Group: Jason Laing, Judy Davidson and Norm Sacuta, for their support during this project. Thanks also to mom for the groceries.

Toronto's Rites) feature writing, book and music reviews, graphics, cartoons and regular sex supplements representing a wide range of lesbian sex practices. Numerous International Lesbian Week activities over the years, including the 1987 events, have focused specifically on sex. For example, the 1989-90 lesbian "Sex on the Wall" calender, the yearly "Sex Shows," (a combination of theatre, performance art, strip shows, staged butch-femme or s/m "scenes" which traditionally closes International Lesbian Week activities) and the "Clit Lit" erotic readings session of the 1990 Gay and Lesbian Games Literary Festival, are meeting the ever increasing need for what Joan Nestle has called "sexually free space," places where lesbians can discover a new language of desire, release or choice (Bad Attitude 3.3 (1987): 4-5).

An entire body of fiction produced by small gay, feminist or lesbian presses also meets that same demand. Anthologies such as Women on Women, Lesbian Love Stories, Lesbian Love Stories Volume 2, Bush Fire, Sapphistry: The Book of Lesbian Sexuality, Macho Sluts, Coming to Power, The First Stroke, Lesbian Sex, Lesbian Passion, The Lesbian Erotic Dance, etc., are published regularly to eager audiences. In addition, magazines such as On Our Backs, OUT: Culture, Media, Politics, Work, Fashion and Health, The Advocate, Breakthrough, GirlJock, Deneuve and OUT/LOOK, all from the United States, and Bad Attitude from Canada, speak to the increasingly visible and demanding "sex culture."

Two of the predominant themes of those representations of lesbian sex cultures are butch-femme images or identifications, and lesbian s/m practices.[2] In the United States, lesbian sadomasochism had already made its first

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[2]It would be impossible to validate such a claim statistically; however, it is my assertion here that the existence of a "sex culture" was produced by the "sex wars," or the pornography vs. censorship debates, and has, as a result, remained visible since.

public appearance by 1978, when members of a San Francisco lesbian-feminist support group known as Samois marched in the Society of Janus contingent of the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade (R. Rich "Feminism and Sexuality" 526). The proponents of lesbian s/m have strengthened their position in public debates over sex practices and representation, and have transformed a sexual practice into a political identity, in part to enter into the (battle)field known as the "sex wars" (Loulan Lesbian Passion 10).

The term "sex wars" encompasses a series of multi-faceted public debates or disagreements about the nature of sexuality, the modes of its representation and its place in women's lives. These debates within feminist and lesbian communities have been accompanied by an anti-pornography vs. anti-censorship split, fueled by the question, "is there a place for sexually explicit photographs and fantasy within a feminist context, or are they evidence of the damage patriarchy has done, and continues to do, to women?" Pornography erupted as the feminist issue of the 1980's. The feminist anti-pornography movement did not necessarily object to sexual explicitness itself, but rather, objected to the reduction of women to either passive, perpetually desiring bodies, or bits of bodies eternally available to men (Segal and McIntosh Sex Exposed 2). In addition, pornography was cited as the cause of male violent sexual behaviors. "Pornography is the theory, rape is the practice" became the slogan of anti-pornography theory and activism, and sexuality became the overriding source of men's oppression of women. Numerous analyses presented male sexuality in terms of a continuum of violence, and many elements of rape, it was argued, were present in all heterosexual relationships. Pornography became a metaphor for the menace of male power.

Critiques offered by Julia Creet, Carol Vance and others suggest that the very public face of lesbian s/m is a product of

that same anti-pornography movement. The analyses and descriptions by North American and British feminists of pornography as fundamentally oppressive to women became restrictions and prescriptions dictating the "appropriate" modes of representing sexuality. Julia Creet, in particular, argues that a movement based upon the repudiation of sexual objectification has had a difficult time re-embracing sex and its inherent complexities without questioning the premises of the movement itself ("Daughter" 139). The larger questions, such as "is all pornography inherently sexist?" or "how do we judge what is and what is not sexist or damaging to women?" were not asked.

The appearance of lesbian s/m and sexually explicit butch-femme images in lesbian-feminist contexts began to signal a desire to interrogate those complex questions, and were met with resistance and harsh criticism by proponents of the anti-pornography movement. More often than not, those lesbians in the anti-censorship camp who opposed public censorship and surveillance, and encouraged the production and re-workings of "pornography" were labelled "male-identified," the ultimate condemnation in lesbian circles (Bensinger "Lesbian Pornography" 83). Creet suggests that lesbian s/m remains a feminist issue, not only because it provides a badly needed forum for discussing sex, power and fantasy, but also because the issue of lesbian s/m fantasy says something about the wider nature of feminism itself. She reverses the common terms of the discussion, and asks not whether s/m is politically feminist, but rather, how feminism may function within the economy of lesbian s/m. She suggests that the feminist "law" disavowing lesbian s/m operates as the law of the "Symbolic Mother" within feminist moral discourse, functioning as a maternal super-ego watching over and correcting its (un)dutiful daughters. Creet concludes by arguing that "the popularity of the debate has much to do with a discussion of the definition of power within feminism,

the power of feminism itself; and with an ambivalence toward power that may characterize feminist consciousness" (138).

Since the appearance of the "sex wars" in Canada, it has become increasingly clear to me that the subsequent fissures/fissions within our communities do indeed reflect theoretical ambivalences surrounding power, sexuality and identity. My inquiries over the years have developed from an examination of the "for" and "against" sides of the sex debates (1990); to an examination of the meaning of the controversy itself (1991); to this current theoretical discussion. I originally felt bewildered at the controversy surrounding the International Lesbian Day poster; fifty percent of the photographs showed women kissing, another twenty-five percent depicted fragments of women's bodies, and the last twenty-five percent represented so-called "vanilla sex," or what could be described as non-s/m sex. The photographs seemed quite innocuous to me, and I did not understand the intense response from lesbians, who in all likelihood had probably engaged in the same activities represented in the poster. The tension between participating in lesbian sex in private and objecting to public images or dialogue about that same activity suggested that, as a "feminist community" we had not adequately interrogated our assumptions and beliefs about sexuality, and, far too often, filtered behaviors through an essentialist and moral, rather than political or theoretical, filter.

I had encountered such a "moral imperative" earlier when I was a founding member of an Edmonton group known as "The Alliance for the Safety of Prostitutes," or ASP. ASP's mandate was to work in conjunction with sex trade workers, prostitutes in particular, to increase safety on the street, and to act as liaison/advocates for sex trade workers. Our main function was to gather information about "bad dates," or customers who assaulted women or refused to pay after sex,

publish the data on what was known as "Bad Trick Sheets," and then distribute the sheets to all women working in the area known as the "strip." We had a great deal of difficulty establishing our credibility on the street. Generally, women refused to talk to us. In addition, we received little support from local feminist action groups in Edmonton. Once we were established, we invited local feminist-activists to come with us, and every invitation was refused. Generally, refusals came in the form of comments such as, "here we are fighting to improve conditions for women, and hookers are out there making money from those same conditions," or "its too hard, seeing all those hurt women acting out their sexual abuse." The most disturbing comment for me was "those women are sleeping with the enemy." It was frustrating to see such a split between self-identified "feminists" and "othered" women; the split suggested to me that, as local feminists, we were still categorizing women into two moral classes: those who were "good" women, fighting for "justice" and "equality," and those who were "bad," women, complicit with the very thing that "we" were trying to protect them from.

We not only received little support from feminist organizations, but we also had difficulty establishing trust with women who worked the strip. All of the three women in ASP were lesbian, and one of us was an ex-prostitute, and yet we still could not establish ourselves as trustworthy. After one unsuccessful walk on the strip, we stopped in at the local gay bar to assess our situation. Shortly after we arrived, a group of women that we had seen working the street, stopped in at the same bar. I encountered one woman in bathroom, who, recognizing me, said "well I guess you're not Christians then." We chatted briefly about who we were, and from that moment on, we were received openly on the strip. The only explanation for the change in our "status" was that we had been "outed" as lesbians in a gay bar. We were not "feminists," trying to convince prostitutes that they were victims, nor

were we moral crusaders trying to get women off the streets. We were clearly "out/laws" ourselves, "queers" quite comfortable in a gay bar filled with other out/laws: gay men, transvestites, transsexuals and prostitutes.

Two things were apparent to me then, and they became even clearer after the International Lesbian Day Poster was published in Vancouver two years later; first, that as feminists, we needed to rethink how we represent ourselves under the signs "feminist," or "lesbian." If we grounded those identities in essentialist beliefs about gender, for example, that women are victims of male aggression and are naturally different than men, and that men are entirely aggressive and predatory, we would be limiting the emancipatory potential of our own movement. Clearly, the sex trade workers that I encountered felt profoundly ambivalent about feminist constructions of gender and sexuality, and did not identify with the category of "woman" supposedly represented by feminists. They expressed anger about feeling judged as "bad girls" for working in the sex business. Similarly, the women who posed for and produced the International Lesbian Day Poster were judged as obscene, "bad," or "male-identified" for wanting to produce images of lesbian sex. It seemed to me that a movement based on identity politics alone was limited and could only evolve into a movement based on morality, where some behaviors and lifestyles were judged as appropriate and worthy of inclusion, while others were condemned and cast "out."

Secondly, it was apparent that the standards governing behavior and lifestyle choices were biased and deeply ambivalent around issues of sexuality. I came out as a young lesbian in Toronto during the 1970's when lesbianism was steeped in turmoil over appropriate sexual behaviors. I remember women whispering about other women, arguing that "x" could not be a "real" lesbian because she practices

"penetration." I began to believe that lesbianism was indeed the morally superior, essentially different and the "natural" sexuality. My later experience with ASP, and the controversy surounding the International Lesbian Day Poster convinced me that lesbian sex was not nearly as "natural" as it had first seemed. As lesbians, we had arbitrarily decided what that sign meant, and externalized those essentialist definitions so that we could control "who" belonged, and indeed, "how" they would belong. When those categories were challenged, as they were in Vancouver with the 1987 poster and earlier in the United States, battle lines were drawn.

This thesis will account for the importance of the sex wars to feminist and queer theory's reevaluation of identity and identity politics. I will explore recent lesbian "texts" -- fiction and erotic photography exhibits -- in order to interrogate the ways in which lesbian sexual identities have been denaturalized and exposed as "performances" since the sex wars. I will argue that the sex wars and pornography debates represent what Jeffrey Weeks has identified as a "moral panic" (Sex, Politics 14-15). Weeks argues that moral panics occur when widespread sexual fears and anxieties are displaced from the "real causes" of the problems onto "folk devils," or an identified social group. The folk devils in this instance are s/m lesbians and the so-called sex radicals. I will argue here that the real causes of the current moral panic are the concepts of identity produced by texts such as the 1970 essay by the Radicalesbians titled "The Woman-Identified Woman," which ground lesbian identity in biologically determined notions of gender. As such, the sex debates can be read as the eruption of the contradictions and tensions of that identity as it has been practiced.

I will argue that second wave lesbian-feminist identity politics, premised in the work of groups such as the Radicalesbians, posited an understanding of lesbianism as

gender-separatist, or as an impulse of a natural homosociality between women. (Sedgwick 86-90). Recent queer theory and politics, what I will call a "third wave" influenced by the challenge to identity politics offered by Michel Foucault in The History of Sexuality, seek to destabilize that notion of lesbianism as gender-separatist, replacing it instead with tropes of gender-transitivity, tropes which situate lesbianism as an impulse of liminality, or transitivity between genders (Sedgwick 89). Such a topos is potentially contradictory, as it, on the one hand, suggests an alliance between lesbians and gay men, but, on the other hand, leads to essentializing and minoritizing models of "queer" sexual identities and politics.[3] However, queer theory offers the possibility of rereading gendered and sexed identities as a performance, or impersonation of the categories of both gender and sex. Queer theory shifts attention away from ontological (and minoritizing) questions of homosexual identity, and toward (universalizing) questions of how sexuality as text is recognized, represented and read. Its models of gender-

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[3]Eve Sedgwick writes that two contradictions structure, or fracture, the crisis of homo/heterosexual definitions; the first is the contradiction between seeing the homo/heterosexual definition, on the one hand, as an issue of active importance for a small, distinct and relatively fixed homosexual minority, or what she calls the minoritizing view, and seeing it, on the other hand, as an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities, or what she calls the universalizing view. The second contradiction is the one already mentioned; the tension between understanding homosexuality as a matter of liminality or transitivity between genders, or seeing it as reflecting an impulse of separatism, or homosociality, within each gender. The distinction between a minoritizing and universalizing view is crucial to my argument; a minoritizing model of sexual identities can only further a practice of identity politics, while a universalizing view can lead to a practice of understanding all sexual identities as constructed and the products of a myriad of discourse. My argument here, that contemporary lesbian texts produced since the sex wars, are denaturalizing sexual identity by deploying tropes of lesbianism as gender transitive rather than gender separatist is situated within an understanding of gender and sexual identities as parodic performances, and is a conjoining of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's and Judith Butler's analyses.

transitivity destabilize essentialist notions of gender and sexuality, replacing them with an understanding of sexed and gendered identity as discursive performances (Butler "Imitation" 24). Consequently, identity can no longer be misread as the site of ontologizing reinscription, regulation and prescription; rather it can be reread as a site of contestation, revision and intervention.

I

Sex Issues

According to Ruby Rich, feminist issues of sexuality began to undergo a series of shifts in style and intensity around 1981-82 in the United States ("Feminism and Sexuality" 526). Two occasions mark the early days of the "sex wars": a 1981 issue of Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics, simply called "Sex Issue"; and The Scholar and the Feminist Conference IX, "Toward a Politics of Sexuality," held at Barnard College in New York City, 1982. Rich suggests that the Heresies collective tried to make its "Sex Issue" as "politically incorrect as possible from the hot porn-playing graphics to the choice of the word 'sex' (the thing itself) instead of 'sexuality' (the academic/scientific issue) as title" (527). The journal's graphics -- everything from porn cartoons to butch-femme images -- and articles, considering sex across a wide range of lesbian, heterosexual and bisexual practices, reflected a spirit of rebellion and a kicking up of the collective heels. The reception of the issue, however, was somewhat innocuous and tepid. Less than a year later, in 1982, the Barnard conference got the response that Heresies invited, but did not receive.

It seems rather unusual that the Heresies "Sex Issue" would go unnoticed. The "Sex Issue" contains almost one hundred pages of text and explicit graphics exploring a wide range of women's sexual practices, not just lesbian sex. Everything from lesbian s/m and butch-femme relationships, celibacy, "faghagging" and straight women's sexuality, the mother-daughter relationship and sex, the father-daughter relationship and sexuality, gay, lesbian and heterosexual "role playing," black women's sexuality, to abortion and childbirth, etc., is included. The editors were clear in their intent; they

wanted to create a forum to explore "that aspect of sexuality which might be called 'desire' ... [and] to inquire into the meaning of sexuality" ("Editorial" 1).

A wide range of sometimes contradictory sexual "meanings" emerge from that inquiry. Clearly, the editors and contributors agree on one issue only; that is, that the work they undertook forced those involved to interrogate their own assumptions about the nature of female sexuality, and stimulated a desire to explore the complex and ambivalent relationships between sexual pleasure and feminist politics. The final editorial ends where the Barnard Conference begins:

> We are convinced that there are no natural positions, political or otherwise, to take regarding female sexuality. The very fact that no single feminist position could be formulated for our issue speaks to the importance of the activity we have undertaken. We have tried to represent a variety of understandings in relation to the expression and repression of our erotic desires and sexual activities. We recognize the need for theoretical exploration to give form and validation to our politics. ("Editorial" 94)

While the "Sex Issue" went comparatively unremarked, the Barnard Conference did not. It seems probable that the context of each determined the type and degree of effectiveness of potential response. Heresies is a feminist journal on "art and politics," and once issue #12 was released, the voices of those who objected might be contained within future Heresies issues. The Barnard Conference, on the other hand, was a public forum, encompassing a much wider (feminist and non-feminist) audience. Those who objected to the Conference mobilized both the media and the Barnard College administration against the conference organizing committee. Those who felt they were not included on the

organizing committee made their presence felt from the very start.

The Barnard Conference, which was described as a coming together of academic respectability and "extremist" discourses on sexuality, sought to bring feminist research, academic scholarship, and politics together (Wilson "Context" 36). In its early planning stages, so-called radical feminists active in the anti-pornography movement were not represented on the planning committee (35). In addition, each Barnard conference planning committee produced a "conference diary" every year which was eventually made available to all those who registered on or before the first day of the conference. As a result of the controversy, the 1982 Conference Diary was seized and impounded by the Barnard College administration. Furthermore, the conference participants were greeted by a line of protesters leafleting the conference agenda as participants arrived (Rich "Feminism and Sexuality" 527). The leaflet, signed by the "Coalition of Women for a Feminist Sexuality and Against Sadomasochism" which included "Women Against Pornography" (WAP), objected to both the "one-sidedness" of the conference planning group and the content of the conference (Wilson "Context" 38).

In addition, the conference organizers were accused of inviting speakers who supported forms of "patriarchal" and "anti-feminist" sexuality, in particular, lesbian sadomasochism (38). According to Wilson, no names were mentioned, but the speakers who were being attacked included Linda Gordon, Ellen DuBois, Alice Echols, Gayle Rubin, and Amber Hollibaugh: these feminists eventually provided critiques of both the anti-pornography movement and cultural feminism, and have subsequently made important contributions to the

development of sex theory and politics.[4] Gayle Rubin, in particular, came under fire for publishing "The Leather Menace: Comments on Politics and S/M" in Samois' controversial Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M. The Conference Diary was eventually released and the conference itself was widely represented (and misrepresented) in the New York alternative press (Wilson 40). Finally, Andrea Dworkin sent out photocopies of the Conference Diary to the alternative press with a letter condemning its obscene and supposedly frightening images, and many members of the organizing committee were questioned by their employers as a result of the uproar (40).

The radical feminists who felt they were excluded from the conference represented feminist anti-pornography groups such as WAP. The organizers of the conference responded later by conceding that the feminist anti-pornography campaigning groups had been excluded, but justified their decision by arguing that the whole of the American feminist debate on sexuality had been dominated by the anti-porn position (Wilson 35). The organizers argued further that they wanted to have a forum for a diversity of views on sexuality and that if the anti-porn perspective were included, it would overwhelm everything else. Finally, the conference organizers feared that further division and confrontation would occur rather than discussion and dialogue.

Some of the organizers' concerns about the possible dominance of the anti-pornography movement have been historicized and theorized by Alice Echols in her essay, "The

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[4]Linda Gordon and Ellen DuBois, "Between Pleasure and Danger"; Alice Echols, "The Taming of the Id: Feminist Sexual Politics 1968-83" Vance, ed., 1984; Gayle Rubin, "The Leather Menace: Comments on Politics and S/M" Samois, ed., 1981, and "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" Vance, ed., 1984; Amber Hollibaugh, "Desire for the Future: Radical Hope in Passion and Pleasure" Vance, ed., 1984.

Taming of the Id: Feminist Sexual Politics 1968-83". She has suggested that anti-pornography feminism has evolved into what she calls "cultural feminism," or that form of feminist politics which equates women's liberation with the nurturance of a female counter culture, "which it is hoped will supersede the dominant culture" (51). Moreover, cultural feminism and its incarnation in the anti-pornography movement polarizes male and female sexuality, demonizing the former as (biologically) violent, irresponsible, genitally oriented, and potentially lethal, and idealizing the latter, as (essentially) spiritual, sensual, less central, mutual and affective (51). She argues that it represents sexual minorities, including transsexuals, gay men, sex trade workers, s/m lesbians, non-monogamous lesbians and gay men as polluted artifacts of male rapaciousness, as damaged by the corrupting influence of male-identified sexuality (60). Thus, cultural feminism reads pornography -- whether lesbian, gay or heterosexual -- as a metaphor for male brutality and female victimization. And it equates sexual freedom with irresponsibility, selfishness and dehumanization; in short, sexual liberation of any sort is synonymous with danger (60).

In describing cultural feminism and its categorical dismissal of sexual minorities, Echols acknowledges that lesbians were the vanguard of a movement that has resurrected terms like "sexual deviance" and "perversion," terms which those same lesbians rallied against a decade ago (61). Echols cites Adrienne Rich's essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," as the source of cultural feminism's desexualization and resignification, or shift in meaning, from lesbianism as "sexual perversion" to lesbianism as "a profoundly female experience" (60). Katie King also suggests that the newly configured images of lesbianism during this period signal its resignification ("Situation" 66). Lesbianism was rewritten or reinscribed with new meanings by the historical "moment" of second wave

feminism, in which whole systems of signifiers were reduced to one (66). Lesbianism came to function as this single privileged signifier, or what King calls feminism's magical sign (67). I want to suggest, however, that the resignification of lesbianism occurred much earlier than Adrienne Rich's essay. I would locate the shift in the 1970 publication of "The Woman-Identified Woman" by the Radicalesbians. "The Woman-Identified Woman" was composed collectively by six members of the New York Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and the National Organization for Women (NOW), who left those organizations to form the Radicalesbians: Lois Hart, Ellen Bedoz, March Hoffman, Barbara X, Rita Mae Brown, and Cynthia Funk (Marotta 240). Dissatisfied with the sexism and contradictions of the GLF, lesbian activists in New York came to think of themselves as doubly constituted, committed to both gay liberation and women's liberation. Many lesbians began to view the women's movement as a place to explore their own particular oppression (241). But as Shane Phelan notes, the influx of lesbians into the women's movement was not without problems (38). Liberal feminists of NOW were extremely uncomfortable with lesbian claims of, and demands, for solidarity. The label "lesbian" had been used to discredit feminism, and many members of NOW's executive committee thought it politically expedient to avoid the issue altogether (Phelan 38).

At the height of the debate within NOW over "the lavender menace," the "Big Six" mentioned above, left NOW and wrote "The Woman-Identified Woman" in order to address the implications of lesbianism for feminism (Marotta 243). It was written to be distributed at the second Congress to Unite Women, held in May 1970. On the first night of the Congress, just after the assembly had settled down for a panel discussion, the lights went out. When they came back on again, a group of twenty-five women wearing t-shirts identifying themselves as "Lavender Menaces" had assembled

at the front of the stage. They had hijacked the conference space to trouble and intervene in the conference proceedings which had been structured to deny the importance and existence of lesbianism. An observer recollects the speech made by one member of the Menace:

> "About a year ago, a media woman made a slur against NOW by saying that they were being run by lavender menaces. She was referring to some officers who were lesbians ... lesbians or women who 'seem' to be lesbians were being referred to as lavender menaces or lavender herrings ... we have come to tell you that we lesbians are being oppressed outside the movement and inside the movement by a sexist attitude. We want to discuss the lesbian issue with you." (Marotta 244)

Copies of the paper were distributed to the audience. The issue was discussed that night and for the duration of the Congress. The final assembly voted to adopt the set of resolutions put forward in the name of "The Lavender Menace: Gay Liberation Front Women and Radical Lesbians," the most important of which, for my purposes here, was:

> Be it resolved that Women's Liberation is a lesbian plot. (Marotta 244-45)

Two figures emerge from the Lavender menace action, their essay and this particular resolution: the rhetorical figure of the woman-identified woman, and the trope of lesbian-feminism as gender separatist. Within the trope of "The Woman-Identified Woman," a lesbian was now "the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion," and her oppression was synechdochal for the oppression of all women (172). The Radicalesbians used this link to argue that the lesbian is the ultimate pariah of male society. The focus on gender and sex roles was joined with the issue of sexual

preference to produce a common base for lesbians and heterosexual women (Phelan 41). "[T]he essence of being a 'woman' is to get fucked by men," the Radicalesbians argued, suggesting that since sexism was the single, most determinate form of oppression for all women, no woman could be free "as long as male acceptability is primary" (174-76). Only women can give each other a new sense of self, and that "self" is one that can only develop in "... the primacy of women relating to women, of women creating a new consciousness of and with each other which is at the heart of women's liberation, and the basis for cultural revolution" (176). That new consciousness, or self, at the heart of the "organic revolution" known as feminism, is that of a woman unattached to men: she is the woman-loving woman. "With that real self, with that consciousness, we begin a revolution to end the imposition of all coercive identifications, and to achieve maximum autonomy in human expression" (177).

In the second trope of lesbian-feminism as gender-separatist, the culture of women-loving women that had originated out of the struggle to create a better society was now offered as that better society itself (Echols Daring 33). The oppression of women by men was proffered as the paradigm and root of all other oppressions and inequalities. The solution was both obvious and simple: men must take care of themselves, and the priority for women must be the union of all women (Phelan 45). Gender was isolated as the critical axis around which alliance and resistance must be organized. Lesbianism thus represents what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick identifies as "a gender-separatist topos": one in which lesbians look for identifications and alliances among women in general, including heterosexual women (89). The woman-loving woman is the most "natural" figure in the world and "people grouped together under the single most determinative mark of social organization, people whose economic, institutional, emotional, physical needs and

knowledges may have so much in common, should bond together also on the axis of sexual desire" (87).

Consequently, "The Woman-Identified Woman" announced that lesbians were the resisters of patriarchy, and as such, represented the vanguard position within feminism. As Phelan explains, the essence of this vanguard position is that lesbians are "living the revolution" and are the only ones truly demonstrating a commitment to feminism, while heterosexual or bisexual women are less feminist (45). These tropes became, and remained, the centerpiece of second wave lesbian feminist discourse.

Both the Radicalesbians' essay and Adrienne Rich's later essay were attempts to desexualize lesbianism as a gesture of accommodation to both heterosexual feminism and mainstream culture. This gesture shifted the focus from lesbianism as a "deviant" sexual relationship between women to lesbianism as the many non-sexual experiences women share with each other along a continuum of relations. The subsequent feminist debates about sexual identity have swung between the tensions and contradictions inherent in this resignification. On the one hand, the argument is that, in order to be a true feminist, one must practice same-gender sex, while, on the other hand, the argument is that feminist identity is not contingent upon same-gender sex but does imply the legal and social support of lesbian practices (Diamond and Quinby "American Feminism" 199). Certainly Rich's critique of the notion of a natural sexual instinct configured socially as compulsory heterosexuality enabling male dominance has been important for the development of lesbian theory. But the often totalizing practice of identity politics was limited by its focus on "who" could belong and on what represented the lesbian sexuality. The sex debates, above all else, exposed the political weaknesses and tensions of the subsequent search for truth, authenticity, and

universals to ground the categories "woman" and "lesbian." As "outlaws," s/m lesbians and the sex radicals troubled the sexual and biological essentialism which grounded second wave feminism, ushering in what Gayle Rubin, echoing Weeks, identifies as border wars, or moral panic ("Thinking Sex" 294).

Influenced by the work of both Michel Foucault and Jeffrey Weeks, Gayle Rubin suggests that moral panics rarely alleviate any real problem because they are aimed at chimeras and signifiers (297). They use pre-existing discursive structures, in this case, the ideological constructions of "woman" as nurturing, sensual, affective, etc., in order to justify treating "vices," or deviant sexual practices, as crimes. Such charges have been made against both s/m lesbians and sex radicals by cultural feminists. In such charges, the discourse on sexuality, or sexology, is replaced by demonology (301).

Rubin suggests that the sexual system needs to shift and argues that it is essential to separate analytically the "gender" and "sex" axes of the sex/gender system to reflect more accurately their separate social existence (308-10). For instance, lesbian feminist discourse has analyzed the oppression of lesbians in terms of gender. But lesbians are also oppressed as sexual deviants, as queers, by the operation of sexual, not gender, stratification. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has developed Rubin's thesis and also argues that "the study of sexuality is not coextensive with the study of gender; correspondingly, antihomophobic inquiry is not coextensive with feminist inquiry" (27).

Sedgwick argues that gender and sexuality represent two analytic axes that "may productively be imagined as being as distinct from one another as, say, gender and class, or class and race" (30). The implication is that

> ... just as one has learned to assume that every issue of racial meaning must be embodied through the specificity of a particular class position -- and every issue of class, for instance through the specificity of a particular gender position -- so every issue of gender would necessarily be embodied through the specificity of a particular sexuality, and vice versa. (30)

The critical usefulness of such a strategic separation between "gender" and "sex" is clearly evident for gay and lesbian, or antihomophobic inquiry. Sedgwick suggests, and I would agree, that there may well be a damaging bias toward heterosocial assumptions inherent in the concept of gender (31). To the degree that gender definition and gender identity are always relational between genders, then intergender relations and behaviors become the necessary privileged diacritical site. As Sedgwick predicts, and the sex/pornography debates demonstrate, "... the analytic bite of a purely gender-based account will grow less incisive and direct as the distance of its subject from a social interface between different genders increases" (32).

The danger of over-privileging the axis of sex is anticipated in the tension between the two contradictory views of homosexuality outlined by Sedgwick. In the first view, what Sedgwick calls the minoritizing view, the homo/heterosexual definition is seen as important primarily for a small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority (1). In the second, or the universalizing view, the homo/heterosexual definition is seen as an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities. If queer theory, mandated by a privileging of sexuality, deploys the rhetoric of foundational identity politics in the service of emancipation, then its subversive intent can be recuperated within the larger humanist agenda both it and feminist identity politics have

been imitating. If, for example, homosexual identity is posited as seamless, stable, coherent, then the homo/heterosexual definition remains a "minority" issue, and there is no deconstructive challenge to the hegemony of humanism. If, on the other hand, queer theory can redeploy the categories of sex and gender against itself, then it can resituate itself within a universalizing view by troubling the ontological ground of all sexual identities.

It is clearly evident that the signs, markers, tracks referring to the relational sex/gender grid are everywhere and unavoidable. However, if, as the paradigm of the sex/gender system suggests, the male or female body is no longer regarded as a fixed, pre-cultural given, but rather, as a substance given determinate form only by being socially inscribed, then the critical weight attached to feminist, ontological notions of "gender" will inevitably tend toward a heterosexualization of sexuality, which is to say, the desexualization of lesbianism. In other words, there is little within the notion of a sex/gender system that dictates congruence between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders, other than the regulatory fiction of heterosexuality (Butler Gender Trouble 6).

In fact, when the sex/gender system is pushed to its logical conclusions by queer theorists such as Judith Butler à la Michel Foucault, then gender cannot be said to follow from biology in any one way (Butler 6). When sexuality is understood in the Foucauldian sense as discursive pleasures and powers produced by a discursive machinery or technology -- a technology which Teresa de Lauretis argues overdetermines the relationship between "sex" and "gender," -- then it is possible to trouble the overdetermined heterosexualized congruence between cultural meanings and biologically differentiated bodies ("Technologies" 3).

Judith Butler does just that when she suggests in Gender Trouble that identity be read as a "performatively enacted signification" (33). It is now possible that "man" and "masculine" might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and "woman" and "feminine" a male body as easily as a female one (6). Gendered and sexed identities become a form of live theatre where scripted identities are acted out. Gender, as Butler defines it, is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being (33).

Butler argues that ontological categories of gender are, in fact, "the effects of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origins," and she critiques feminism's identity politics as dangerously grounded in the same phallogocentric categories it seeks to dismantle (xi). Moving away from the belief in an ontological and stable "doer," Butler argues that fables of gender establish and circulate what Katie King calls the "big three," the sins of essentialism, universalism and naturalism ("Producing" 84). Positing instead that there is no "doer," only "deeds," Butler calls for an understanding of sex and gender as regulatory performances, compulsively repeated, which produce, as effects, stable and natural gendered/sexed identities (25).

Butler moves away from the notion of a self that exists prior to culture and maintains integrity prior to its entrance into this conflicted cultural field (145). Instead, she argues that "there is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very 'taking up' is enabled by the tool lying there" (145). In other words, Butler argues that the subject is constituted through a field of signification. As such, identity is the effect of discourse, enabled by a "regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects"

(145). The effects of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality are misdescribed as foundations, and are avowed (while other options are simultaneously disavowed) through a compulsive repetition that reestablishes the sign each time it is repeated (148). "The task," Butler writes, "is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, *to displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself" (148).

Heterosexuality is thus exposed as an incessant and panicked imitation of its own naturalized idealization ("Imitation" 23). Heterosexuality is always in the act of reproducing itself, not biologically, but through self-referential resignification: "it knows its own possibility of becoming undone: hence, its compulsion to repeat which is at once a foreclosure of that which threatens its coherence" (23).

Butler concludes that gay and lesbian practices which play with the gendered exchanges of desire are not the unnatural "other" that heterosexual gaze implies, nor are they a parodic imitation of the original (heterosexuality). Rather, tropes of gender transitivity, or understandings of homosexuality as movement between genders, represent the parody of the idea of the natural and original (Gender Trouble 31).

> The idea that butch and femme are in some sense "replicas" or "copies" of heterosexual exchange underestimates the erotic signification of these identities as internally dissonant and complex in their resignification of the hegemonic categories by which they are enabled. Lesbian femmes may recall the heterosexual scene, as it were, but also displace it at the same time. In both butch and femme identities, the very notion of an original or natural identity is put into question. (123)

Similarly, the practices of butch-femme and cross-dressing, problematize the notion of an original or primary gender identity. "In imitating gender," Butler writes, "drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself -- as well as its contingency" (137).

The usefulness of Butler's theory of identity as performance is twofold. Initially, it troubles ontological notions of gender, feminist and humanist alike. It exposes the cloaked power producing identities, and allows for both sexed and gendered interventions in those discourses. Secondly, Butler does not disavow the strategic deployment of identity for political purposes. She does not advocate a return to invisibility or silence, but instead, calls for the direct use of those categories upon which political oppression hinges. This implies a contradiction, as Butler herself asks "how to use the sign ["lesbian" or "gay"] and avow its temporal contingency at once?" ("Imitation" 19).

The answer she offers allows a "lesbian" identity to be used in the service of emancipatory politics without being reinscribed as a normalizing category: the deployment of a strategically provisional lesbian identity: "In avowing the sign's strategical provisionality (rather than its strategic essentialism), that identity can become a site of contest and revision, indeed, take on a future set of significations that those of us who use it now may not be able to foresee" ("Imitation" 19).

Provisional identity facilitates the use of identity as the starting point for a strategic intervention, while not foreclosing on future resignifications. In The History of Sexuality Foucault argues that power and authority are no longer vested in a central point; power is the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization (92). Likewise,

resistance is coded everywhere in the power network (96). Hence, discourse, or that form of power that circulates in the social field and can attach to strategies of domination as well as those of resistance, is neither wholly a source of domination nor of resistance (Sawicki 43). This means that there can be no final word concerning the strategic use of identity in the service of emancipatory politics. Any practice is potentially co-optable and any capable of becoming a source of resistance. Second wave feminist identity politics sought refuge in ontologizing, essentialist definitions. The result has been a questionable reinscription of the very limiting signs "woman" and "lesbian." Avowing the sign's provisionality, as Butler suggests, under the aegis of coalitional politics may codify the necessary points of resistance that make a revolution possible (Foucault 96). In chapter two, I will explore the deployment of such provisional lesbian identities in two texts; Sarah Schulman's Empathy, and Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza. I will argue that the lesbian identities reinscribed in both of these texts deconstruct second wave feminism's lesbian subject position by using the expunged excess of that category, or that which was left out of the definition, against the category itself. The relationships between sex, gender and identity are no longer ontologically fixed and static, but rather, are fluid, contextual and in motion. In chapter three, I will examine the reconstruction and re-eroticization of lesbianism in two books of erotic lesbian photography: Della Grace's Love Bites; and Kiss and Tell's Drawing the Line.

I I

Troubling Identities

In chapter one, I argued that the Radicalesbians used the category "lesbian" as a rallying point against what they identified as "patriarchy." That definition became, in turn, its own regulatory regime, a normalizing category of sorts, built upon illusions of unity, stability and coherence. Furthermore, I concurred with Judith Butler's argument that "identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression" ("Imitation" 13-14). The sex debates exposed and contested the meanings and limits associated with that naturalized identity and its accompanying identity politics.

In this chapter, I will explore how that regulatory identity has been destabilized in two "lesbian" texts: Sarah Schulman's Empathy, and Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza. Both of these texts deconstruct the subject of second wave lesbian-feminist identity politics by deploying the expunged excess of that category against the category itself. Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza challenges the color blindness of identity politics. The narrator of Anzaldúa's text, a lesbian of color living on the psychic "borderlands" between multiple and shifting identities, reconfigures the discursive relationships between sex, gender and race. The provisional "queer" subject of Anzaldúa's text is not a fixed and coherent "self," but is a contextual "identity" perpetually in motion, an identity continually assumed but immediately called into question. Schulman's novel also explores the difficult negotiations through discursive

identities, only, in this instance, identities marked by multiple gender identifications rather than by racial specificities. "Anna O.," a seemingly lone lesbian figure in the apocalyptic New York city-scape, becomes "Doc," a "male" post-Freudian street-corner psychiatrist when her lover, a mysterious woman in white leather, leaves her for a heterosexual lover. Anna O. eventually meets Dora, with whom she and "Doc" discover a different lesbian identity altogether. Lesbian identity in this text is also fluid, contextual and continually in process. The strength of both of these texts is in their exposure of identity as an unstable fiction, or a "performatively produced fabrication" (Butler "Imitation" 29). Sexual identity is also exposed as an unstable and denaturalized discursive performance, a fiction that is worked, in these texts, against gender identity, reminding the "reader" (of identity) that "that which cannot fully appear in any performance [will] persist in its disruptive promise" (Butler "Imitation" 29).

Schulman's novel opens with a quotation from Sigmund Freud's 1920 "A Case Of Homosexuality in a Woman," which introduces the "players" of the numerous and complex "performances" that are to follow.

> Some of her intellectual attributes could be associated with masculinity: for instance her acuteness of comprehension and her lucid objectivity, insofar as she was not dominated by her passion.... It signified the attainment of the very wish, which, when frustrated, had driven her into homosexuality-namely, the wish to have a child by her father.... Once she had been punished for an over-affectionate overture made to a woman, she realized how she could wound her father and take revenge on him. Henceforth she remained homosexual out of

defiance against her father.

The players in Schulman's post-Freudian novel are "Doc," or the analyst; "masculinity" and its implied, or absent counterpart, "femininity"; an as yet unnamed "female homosexual" or the child; the child's father and the family romance; an anonymous woman; and finally, the scene of psychoanalysis itself. Psychoanalytic discourse is the mise-en-scène of the novel, suggested by both the title of the novel, "empathy" or, "the power of projecting one's personality into (and so fully comprehending) the object of contemplation" (OED), and by the names of the characters, Anna O., "Doc." and "Dora."

"Anna O." was the name given in psychoanalytic literature to Bertha Pappenheim, a woman who was treated by one of Freud's colleagues Dr. Joseph Breuer. Peter Gay notes that although Freud did not actually treat Anna O.'s hysteria himself, he was fascinated by Breuer's account of her case ("Case Histories" 60). Gay included Breuer's case history of Anna O. in The Freud Reader because it was the springboard for Freud's developing theory of transference / counter-transference. Hence, Gay writes that "Anna O. may claim the distinction of being the founding patient of psychoanalysis" (61). Anna O. was treated for hysteria, and is described (by Breuer) as possessing a "sympathetic kindness ... [e]ven during her illness she herself was greatly assisted by being able to look after a number of poor, sick people" (61). Furthermore, Anna O. was said to regularly embellish her illness by "indulging in systemic day-dreaming, which she described as her 'private theatre'" (62). Eventually, Anna O. experienced "absences," which Breuer described as distinct and alternating states of consciousness; she eventually lost "her power of speech" during moments of extreme anxiety; lost her ability to understand her native language, German, but acquired an ability to read in French and Italian, and to

speak only English; and wrote or told long narratives, or stories, during her frequent absences (67). Anna O. was eventually "cured" of her hysteria, attributed in part to two psychical characteristics present while she was still "healthy:" first, her monotonous family life and the absence of adequate intellectual occupation which, according to Breuer, gave her a "surplus of mental liveliness and energy"; and second, the fact that this "surplus of mental liveliness," according to Breuer, found an "outlet in the constant activity of her imagination" (her "private theatre") or what he continually calls her "absences" (76).

Freud's work on "female homosexuality" is as crucial to this novel as Breuer's case history of Anna. Freud's speculations on female homosexuality were confined to his 1920 essay already mentioned and to the footnotes of his 1905 "Fragments of an analysis of a case of hysteria" (Wright "Feminism" 215). Freud saw a young woman who was "handed over" to him by her father, six months after she attempted suicide by flinging herself over a wall on to a railway line which ran close by (Merck Perversions 15). She lived in "devoted adoration" of a woman who was ten years her senior, and who, although she had had numerous affairs with women, engaged with Freud's patient on a purely platonic basis. Despite this distance, the young woman had become so infatuated with the older woman that she abandoned her studies and social life, and pursued a courtship which consisted of sending flowers, waiting at "tramstops" and occasionally talking long walks with her. The pair were inevitably discovered by the girl's father, and immediately after this discovery, the young girl attempted to end her life. Freud went on to name what he considered to be the cause of her lesbianism as a "masculinity complex," understood as the result of a disappointed love for the woman's father, whom she eventually renounces along with all men, repressing her

wounded femininity in favour of an aggressive identification with masculinity (Wright 215).

I describe the case history of Anna O. and Freud's analysis of lesbianism in some detail, because I intend to argue that the "action" of Schulman's novel takes place primarily within Anna's psyche, her "private theatre," as it were, and occurs through the processes of projection, transference, counter-transference, and, of course, empathy. The "Anna O." of this novel is constituted by multiple and melancholic sex/gender identifications, which are acted out and eventually resolved in the transferential scene between her and the character "Doc," whom she creates during her textual "absences." Because lesbian desire is only imaginable in Anna's world through heterosexual tropes of desire, she withdraws from that world and reconfigures the conditions of representation structured by psychoanalysis in order to represent the unrepresentable. In other words, Schulman rewrites the story of Anna O., with Anna herself, newly figured as lesbian and in charge of the narrative. Eventually, Anna writes herself through and beyond the limits of psychoanalytic discourse.

It is clear that Anna in Empathy is suffering from melancholia, and not mourning. In his 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud wrote that melancholia is distinguished from mourning by the psychic identification made with the lost object, or ideal. The ego refuses the loss, and incorporates this object into itself. The individual suffering from melancholia is unable to grieve the loss, and as Butler notes, engages in a "certain *mimetic practice* that seeks to incorporate the lost love within the very 'identity' of the one who remains."[1] Butler has argued that gender

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[1]Butler "Imitation" 26. Butler argues that erotic style or gender presentation is constituted by psychic identifications, and is, therefore, a highly unstable category. My use of the idea of psychic

performances are not of the type that are put on or taken off at will. Rather, these performances are constituted by specific identifications which form an erotic style and/or gender presentation (26). Anna O. experiences a series of "crises" or important losses that she, in a sense, refuses, and which destabilize her erotic and gendered identities: Joanie; the woman in white leather; the security of familial and heterosexual privilege; and the loss of hope symbolized by the apocalyptic and AIDS devastated New York city-scape. Consequently, she incorporates those losses into her identity through a mimetic practice, until she is finally able to resolve those "conflicts of ambivalence."[2] Eventually, the narrative she produces with "Doc" as he/she "put[s] his[/her] own self down on the couch" allows her to narrate herself through, and beyond the end of the novel and the discursive scene of psychoanalysis (13). Together, Doc and Anna create an intervention in the conditions of representation, thus rendering lesbian desire between Anna and Dora readable. Since it seems that discourse, and not ontology, is the ground of identity in this novel, Anna accomplishes this by occupying the site of "he" as well as the place of "she," exposing binarized identities -- male/female, hetero-homosexual -- as unstable ontological categories, discursively bound together. However, as we shall see, Schulman's novel also exposes what might be called the "paradox of parody": parody, as a process which relies on a target text or discourse as well as a critical distancing from that text, inevitably reinscribes the values associated with that text. In other words, as an authorized

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identification here is necessarily limited to a demonstration of how Schulman's novel complicates and denaturalizes lesbian sexual identities; sexual identity is no longer the natural essence that lesbian identity politics represented it as, but rather, is a much more complicated construction produced within specific historical, socio-political and psychical conditions.

[2]Freud writes that it is possible for melancholia to come to an end when "the fury [the ego raging against itself as an expression of anger at the lost object now incorporated] has spent itself or [when] *the object is abandoned as no longer of value* " ("Mourning" 138-9) .

transgression, parody is dependent upon the very thing it seeks to dismantle.

The "Prologue," which reads like a scripted play, constructs the mise-en-scène, as it were, for the drama that is set to unfold in Anna's psyche. The "female homosexual" is named as Anna and she is sitting "in the dark" with the woman she loves, feeling "casual and pleasurably feminine" (1). Anna's original "over-affectionate overture made to a woman" has already taken place and here we see Anna re-orchestrate and re-play the scene over again. The woman Anna is sitting with asks Anna to tell her about "a big" mistake she has made. It is at this moment that the reader is also informed of that "mistake." The overture occurred when Anna plays a game, at her own suggestion, with a man, Jack, and a woman, Joanie, with whom she has been drinking. The game involves one person speaking a fantasy and the other two fulfilling it. Anna suggested that Jack leave the room so that she and Joanie can make love. Joanie refuses.

A second rejection occurs when the "handsome and wicked" woman Anna has been telling the story to also rejects her. That woman returns later in the "Prologue" no longer "handsome and wicked," but rather, looking "very different" wearing a "rough, white, dirty, sleeveless T-shirt like some guy" (5), and with an important realization.

> "What's the matter?" Anna said.
> "Remember that fight we had last winter?"
> "Yes."
> "Well, I was thinking about it," the woman said.
> "And then I finally realized something ...
> I realized that I'm not a lesbian anymore. I realized that women don't have fun together. I realized that that's not love. I realized that men are heroes after all." (5-6)

At this point Anna considers psychic flight, the first of many "absences" in the novel. "As for Anna," the narrator notes,

> she was caught in a burning apartment. There were flaming rafters and charred beams falling all around her... But it had happened so fast she had not yet decided to flee. She was still, unrealistically, trying to determine which items to take along ... Anna did not want to understand. She knew this word *he*. She'd heard it before in every circumstance of her life. But what did it mean? What did it really mean? (6, emphasis in original)

When Anna asks the woman, "What is your definition of fun?", the answer she receives clearly tells her that lesbian desire, which Anna has already experienced as both "love" and "fun" ("*This is love. This is fun.*"), is unimaginable within this script (3):

> "Fun," the woman explained, "is when you get what you've always imagined. When you've always known what you want and then you get it. With a woman you can't have this because you've never imagined what you've wanted." (6)

The terms of the "real" in Anna's world are determined here by the limits of what is imaginable. Her happiness is unimaginable. "How can I be a woman and still be happy?" she asks, wondering "what happened to the world that I was promised back in first grade in 1965?" (6-7). It is at this point that Anna takes refuge in a meta-fictional narrative, taking with her the identities **he**, **she**, **man**, and **woman** to begin re-writing her narrative. It could have been "any lonely night in any storybook," Anna decides as she "flies away in bed" (7). "I am a character in some movie," she later decides, "and someone else wrote the script" (36). "Back on earth she lay,"

the narrator tells us, disembodied, and "dissatisfied, between two pieces of printed cotton" (7).

The first chapter of Anna's narrative begins with the introduction of a "new" character with "new" possibility: "The next morning a Doctor awoke from unsettling dreams ... The world was **his** this chilly morning. **He** could be human, inadequate, and still have it all" (9, emphasis mine). Anna's meta-textual "aggressive identification with masculinity" is complete when "Anna" disappears and "Doc" steps upon the stage.

Doc "had been born a Freudian" (10). Both of his parents were psychoanalysts, and Doc was raised in psychoanalysis the same way other children were raised in religion. "[H]e had done his internship and residency simply by growing up" (10). He also seems to experience many more "ideas" than "feelings," and insofar as he "was not dominated by ... [his] passion," he could continue his life-long pursuit of "the big *Why* " (11). Both Anna's and "Doc's" parents are remarkably similar in many ways. "Doc's" father is a therapist, as is Anna's: "What an odd comment," Anna said. "What a terrifying thought. What a confusing possibility. What a construction. My father takes care of people and I do too. Does that mean I have problems with my femininity" (71). Doc's mother was "wildly opinionated," as is Anna's, who remarks on everything from Anna's clothing ("Thank God you wore a dress") to the politics of a man who has just died ("The man was a fascist pure and simple ... he was a real Republican. He voted for Goldwater. I remember I told him I voted for Henry Wallace and he said, 'Who?'") (38-40).

As a therapist like his parents, Doc "went into business because it was more important for him to understand than to have someone to go on vacation with" (11). And like his parents, he too sits listening to patients with "expressionless

concern," waving his "arms about broadly as the substitute for a feeling" (10). It later becomes apparent that Doc has feelings only when he encounters potential and actual "patients," and the complicated processes of projection and transference/counter-transference begins.

> Handing it [his business card] out with meaningful glances, Doc looked at passersby as potential patients. He wondered which person and their problems would enter and transform his life? ... These strangers filled him with feeling. There were so many things he wanted to go through with them. ... There was a palpable relief in being Doc. He felt suddenly happy, purposeful in life. (14-15)

Doc hands his business card to three separate people, and speculates on the help he could offer each of them.

> Doc noticed one young man who had that expression on his face as though he had given up looking for work. ... Doc could tell him how many millions had the same problem. That it wasn't personal. ... Another guy passed by. He had a neuromuscular disorder, maybe MS. His boyfriend was scared ... Doc could sit down with both of them and lay out the facts. He could help them face it. ... That woman over there had an observant ego. Sessions with her would be a sharing of ideas ... Doc and she would sit back proposing this or that. They would just talk. (14)

By the time the fictional (meta-)identity of "Doc" collapses, it becomes apparent that these early speculations are, in fact, projections of, or clues to Anna's own "troubling" losses already mentioned: a loss of privilege and security ("many millions had the same problem ... it wasn't personal"); the loss of hope in an AIDS devastated landscape (the sick man with his scared "boyfriend ... Doc could sit down with

both of them and lay out the facts. He could help them face it"); and the loss of his(her) ideal relationship ("sessions with her would be a sharing of ideas ... they would just talk"). All three of these people eventually see Doc for therapy, and Doc's performance in "[t]his play ... called FAILURE" ends rather dramatically when the couple, Sam and Jo, much like Anna/Doc and the woman in white leather, fail to resolve their differences (148).

> "Sam," Doc said, really excited, "we're finally getting somewhere here. It's wonderful ... See Sam? Jo is making you an offering. Sam, answer this question. What is more important to you? Would you rather put Jo down or be listened to?"
> "I don't put Jo down," Sam said. "But Jo is too threatened to realize that."
> "Why is Jo threatened?"
> "Because Jo cannot compare Jo to me."
> ... That phrase --*don't compare yourself to me* -- it was exactly what the woman in white leather had said to Doc ...
> Doc placed his head in his hands and wept. (149-51)

The primal scene of the novel, the moment when Anna experiences debilitating loss and passes as "Doc," becomes a domineering menace and continually "returns" to threaten the stability and coherence of Anna's meta-fictional identity. In the end, the woman in white leather, onto to whom Anna's previous rejection from Joanie has been displaced, does indeed return, and Anna, via "Doc," writes her out of the narrative altogether. Anna imagines two possible endings to the story, endings which facilitate both catharsis and resolution. The first ending is shocking: "Doc took out and gun and shot her" (160). But the narrator intervenes, reminding both Anna and the reader that, in fact, the last chapter was fiction, a "lie. At least, the end of it is. That is not what happened. That was just Doc projecting his worst fears onto

the page. Actually he and this woman stepped out for a cup of coffee" (161).

The second ending is far more complicated, yet equally meta-fictional. And it is with this ending that Anna via "Doc" bumps up against the heterosexual limitations of psychoanalysis. Lesbianism has been entirely unimaginable within this frame, and it is at this point in the novel that Doc, as a character, outgrows his usefulness. Doc and the woman are walking; "Doc felt good walking next to this mean woman" (162). "What do you like about me, Anna?" the woman finally asks, refusing to see "Doc" at all.

> "I like the way you like flowers," Doc said. "I like your muscles. I like the way you kiss when you come."
> Then Doc added, "I haven't been myself lately."
> "Why, because you've been alone?"
> "No," Doc answered, "because I've been without you."
> They never spoke to each other again. (162)

Anna, as "lesbian" constituted within the matrix of psychoanalysis and its heterosexual and essentialist tropes of desire, cannot hope to experience anything more than a masochistic pleasure with this woman. Her sessions with Doc have allowed her to understand her sexual identity as unstable, precarious, and always already heterosexual within a psychoanalytic master-narrative. However, Anna's passing as Doc displaces the gendered norms of that narrative. Until the woman in white leather returns, the reader does not know, in fact, that Anna has occupied the site of both "he" and "she" in this novel. Anna acknowledges that she is not trying to "pass" for an audience, but rather, is using "he" as an identity for herself because "it's easier" (158).

> [H]ow many times can a person be told in a

> multitude of ways that she will never be fully human because she is not a man. The logical conclusion is to become a man to herself. (158)

The woman in white refuses Anna's/Doc's explanation. She/he persists.

> Let's say," he continued, "let's say that a man has a job at a fancy newspaper. He gets up in the morning and all his clothes are wrinkled but, instead of ironing them, he takes the least wrinkled shirt and wears it to work ... Now, how do you feel about this man?
> "Well," she said, "he's not a saint ...
> "Okay," Doc said ... "Now, what if we took exactly the same scenario but with a woman ... If she actually showed up at the office in a wrinkled blouse, we would have to spend the rest of the book justifying it. Now do you understand why I use *he* ?" (157-58)

Anna becomes "a man" by merely stepping into those shoes, as it were. The ontological meanings associated with being male -- for instance, that in order to be masculine one needs to possess a biologically male body -- are disrupted and eventually displaced. Anna actually **is** the "male" character Doc, because she realizes that "Anna O.," a lesbian, cannot exist.

> I was trying to prove that I was not something that could actually never exist. ... Freud says I was *driven into homosexuality* because I wanted to have my father's child. The end result was that I, Anna O., could not exist. I was nothing. (158)

Anna names the fundamental paradox at the heart of both her story, and the conditions of representation in the novel.

> "I only existed relationally. I only existed in relation to men. I'm sick of being a reflection.

> How many times do I have to come out? And do I always have to do it anecdotally? When it's not a story, but a constant clash of systems. When it's a travelling implosion?" (158-59)

That deconstructive "implosion" occurs when Anna's identity as Doc is exposed. The reader overhears the woman in white leather ask Anna why she is dressed as a man, and Anna is outed (156). Her performance as "Doc" is revealed as an imitation, and it isn't until Anna is defined in relation to women, specifically Dora, that Doc disappears, and "Anna" as lesbian exists.

In addition, Anna attempts a resolution of sorts with her psychoanalyst father. And it is also at this moment that we realize that "Doc's" obsession with listening and "not being heard" stems from what is actually audible within the family script. Anna is celebrating a seder with her family and her father is called out on an emergency. Anna follows him into the hallway of the building and attempts to talk to him. Their conversation gets stuck in a concatenated discursive loop as "Irv" is unable to hear what Anna is trying to tell him outside of the frame of psychoanalysis.

> Anna[:] Pop, I just want to let you know that I realize you believe in Freud and everything, and I'm not going to go into that right now.
> Irv[:] I don't have that much time right now.
> Anna[:] I know. But I just want to tell you that, despite what Freud says, the reason I am a lesbian is not because of wanting to hurt you. It's not about you in any way. I really love you, Pop, and I'm a lot like you and being a lesbian is about me.
> Irv[:] I'm glad to hear that you love me. Sometimes I'm not too sure. (179)

Judith Butler has argued that "one way in which this system of compulsory heterosexuality is reproduced and concealed is through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with "natural" appearances and "natural" heterosexual dispositions" ("Performative Acts" 275). Clearly, Anna's performance as "Doc" in this novel simultaneously reproduces, and then interrupts the "cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with natural appearances." But Schulman disrupts the production of the heterosexually dis/positioned subject in this novel as well. In fact, sexual identities of all sorts are "troubled." When we first meet Anna, she is involved with a woman who refuses lesbianism, and returns to a heterosexual lifestyle. Later, as Doc, Anna's desire for the woman in white leather is heterosexualized: "Doc turned to his companion and said: "You are the woman I want to have in my life. I can talk to you and about you at the same time. That is why I will always love you." A great burden was lifted from his chest then. He had finally found a woman to ... love ... " (12).

The sexual identity of the woman in white leather seems equally precarious. Initially, she leaves Anna because she discovers that "men are heroes after all" (6). "I'm not a lesbian anymore," she tells Anna. Later, when she returns and finds Anna dressed as a man, she acknowledges her need for her.

> "Six months after you left me, Anna, I was still in love with you. After nine months, while fucking someone else on a regular basis, I was still in love with you. Now, after a year with that guy, I have to get you back in my life. I have to because my life is less pleasurable without you in it." (155-56)

Later, Dora names that "need:"

> "You don't look like a man to me," Dora said. "You don't smell like one, you don't feel like one or act

> like one."
> "Okay," Doc said, trying to relax and trying on the label *Anna* at the same time. "Okay, but that woman in white really made me feel like one of the guys."
> "Well," Dora answered, "obviously you couldn't give her what she needed."
> "What was that?"
> "She needed you to prove that she is heterosexual."
> That resonated so thoroughly with Anna. She felt so suddenly at ease. (163)

And Anna's own catalogue raisonné of ex-lovers reads like a 'Who's Who' of the (hetero) sexually confused. From the woman in white leather, to the "opera singer who couldn't stop coming and the waitress who didn't know how," Anna's life had been "propelled by strategizing for access to the female body" (70). None of her lovers have been clearly lesbian or heterosexual.

> "Doctor, in all my years of homosexuality I have never had sex with another lesbian ... I didn't like being told that lesbians were the only group I could pick from. ... there's also that big lie about homosexuality. I don't believe that it's just this tiny little band of deviants. I've been crossing the thin line all my life on a regular basis. If they'll sleep with me, how straight can they be?" (34-5)

Identities are continually turned in upon themselves, imploded and exposed as unstable fictions, and cloaked as the ground of discourse, rather than as its effects.

Finally, it is no accident that it is with Dora, another character in the psychoanalytic metanarrative whom Anna meets travelling on an underground train, that lesbianism, the desire which has lurked just outside of the frame, finally

becomes distinguishable. If we recall in Freud's "A Case Study of Homosexuality in a Woman," the young woman that Freud "treats" for lesbianism attempted to escape the conditions of her life by throwing herself on to a train track. Here we see Anna's previous life ended when she meets Dora on an underground train. She meets a fellow "traveler," another lesbian who is also trying to render her desire visible within a frame that precludes the possibility of her existence. Together, they successfully traverse the limitations of the narratives that constrain them.

> *When I put my hand inside her there is a waiting room filled with amiable travelers. When she comes, they go and pass us by ...* Eyes that were full of trains. Hair that was full of trains. Air travel is meaningless, merits no comparisons but these women had trains for veins. Clacking late nights, passing bright lights, and cigarettes out the windows of strangers' compartments. Anna came out ... . (182, emphasis in original)

Anna and Dora reinscribe lesbianism not as a transcendent essence, but rather, as represented by the momentary exchange of desire between two female bodies. It is ironic, indeed paradoxical, that the very backdrop which allows the reader to "read" Anna vis-à-vis Doc, as female, and then as lesbian, is, in fact, that same rather essentialist female body that Anna had been seeking in her lovers. The lesbian scenes between Anna and Dora turn upon their love-making, and lesbianism is reinscribed as a provisional and fluid identity, grounded in an essentialist and unproblematic notion of the female sexual body.

> Later, Anna got out that old book *Romantic Sentences* that Mrs. Noren had given her. There she wrote:
> -Fingering your sticky little ears.

> -Under her skin there are capillaries. The blood moseys along.
> -There is milk in there somewhere. Maybe her throat.
> "I want to write on your face with Magic Marker," Anna said. (167)

The "body" has figured very prominently throughout Schulman's novel as a conspicuous absence. From the very early moments of the novel when Anna lay "dissatisfied, between two pieces of printed cotton" (7) to Anna's inability to fit "properly into her dress" (70), the body has been shrouded in contradictory, and indeed, ambivalent meanings. In turn, those meanings have determined what shape identity has taken. For example, Anna's body becomes **he** simply by dressing in men's clothing, and yet he is later exposed as **she** when her ex-lover reads the discontinuity between Anna's appearance and her "female body." Lesbianism is also shaded in radically differing ways, determined in part, by the way the body is figured into that narrative. For instance, Anna and her lesbian friends attend a funeral for Nancy's mother; Nancy is not out to her family as a lesbian and the group of lesbians decide to "look as straight as [they] possibly can" so as to not inadvertently "out" Nancy (114). They dress in "their best, most feminine clothing" and walk into the funeral where all Nancy's relatives are wearing "polyester double knits" (115). Anna explains the reception they received.

> They couldn't stop staring. Later, at the shiva her Uncle Heshy asked me if we were a rock and roll band. It's really hard to get away with being the wrong thing. (115)

The "difference" between Anna, Nancy and their lesbian friends and Nancy's family is noticed, misnamed and ultimately displaced. It is impossible for those self-identified lesbians to step into traditionally feminine clothing and

perform as if straight; their "difference" is readily apparent. Clothes, in this instance, do not "make the woman," as it were, and yet if we were to read this scene through performance theory, they should in the same way that Anna became "male" when she occupied the site of **he** in the novel. She, on the other hand, passed as **he** to the reader until the context, male clothing on a "female body," was revealed. In other words, Doc's identity as **he** was not unlike an essentialist and naturalized definition of **he** until it was read against a traditional notion of the female body as essentially **she**. Until that moment, there was little in Doc's performance to suggest a radical discontinuity between the socially constructed meanings of masculinity and biologically determined notions of masculinity.

This tension in Schulman's novel between sex/gender as performance and sex/gender as biologically determined essence, demonstrates the degree to which identity as a free-floating artifice has to be read against an essentialized body in order to be understood as performance. As such, Empathy signals one of the central weaknesses of Butler's theory of identity as parodic performance. That is, that the performance has to be read, by knowing spectators/readers, against a context that will expose it as "artifice." As such performance theories are limited by the fact that identity needs a context through which it is read. In this instance, that context had to be the "body." For instance -- cross dressing, in this case, Anna's passing as male -- does not always disrupt essentialist scripts unless it is read against a somewhat identifiable and seemingly stable ground, in this case Anna as female. And if we are reading Anna's identity vis-à-vis the body as female, then, in a sense, we are reading it through scripts of biological essentialism. Linda Hutcheon explains what seems to be a fundamental paradox at the heart of performance theory.

... the role of self-consciously revolutionary

> texts is to rework those discourses whose weight has become tyrannical. This is not imitation; it is not a monologic mastery of another's discourse. It is a dialogic, parodic reappropriation of the past ... it "disrealizes" and "dethrones" literary norms. ... Nevertheless, parody's transgressions ultimately remain authorized - authorized by the very norm it seeks to subvert. Even in mocking, parody reinforces; in formal terms, it inscribes the mocked conventions onto itself, thereby guaranteeing their continued existence. ... Clearly the nature of the legitimizing authority in parody is a complicated issue. (72-6)

Schulman's novel, in its initial troubling of identities and subsequent reinscription of a provisional lesbian identity, explores and even fictionalizes these problems inherent in Butler's theory. It exposes identity as an unstable discursive fiction, and reinscribes those mocked conventions, in this case, the essentialized meanings associated with the male and female bodies, thereby guaranteeing their existence.

Gloria Anzaldúa's autobiography Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza explores many of these same problems. She too deconstructs racial, gendered and sexed identities, and, although she reinscribes a provisional identity in the service of emancipatory politics, she too reinscribes more traditional notions of the body. However, probably more than Schulman's, Anzaldúa's narrator manages to figure the body in relation to identity in such a way as to not leave those meanings unattended. Identities of all sorts are continually assumed, but immediately called into question, in a vertiginous and endless play of deferral and displacement.

Autobiography, as a genre, seems particularly efficacious in that it offers previously "Othered" peoples the opportunity to interrogate the production of identities in

general. In her 1988 essay, "Lesbian Identity and Autobiographical Difference[s]" Biddy Martin theorizes the relationship between the two slippery categories "lesbian" and "autobiography." Martin looks at both the "lesbian" and the "autobiographical" in recent writing such as autobiographical essays or narratives, coming-out stories and the autobiographical writings of women of colour, and argues that both are plagued by the "assumptions of referentiality" (78). For lesbian identity in particular, this referentiality has taken the form of identity politics. With respect to coming-out stories, referentiality takes the form of a linear narrative in which the speaker tells of her journey to discover her transcendent lesbian self. Martin suggests, instead, that what should be examined in autobiographies are the systemic institutional relationships that exceed the boundaries of the lesbian community, the women's movement or particular individuals, and in which communities are deeply implicated (78).

Moreover, an emphasis on referentiality rather than on discursive and systemic institutional relationships equates sexual knowledge with autobiographical truth, illustrating the existence of what Foucault has called a complex discursive machinery producing sexual subjects (History of Sexuality). Foucault argues that the relationship between truth, knowledge and sexuality is the product of a discursive machinery which, since the 19th century, has had as its goal the containment, regulation and control of sexual bodies. Medical, legal and psychoanalytical discourse sought to "know" and hence, contain, deviancy by constructing definitive categories of sexually deviant and marginal personality types. In an often quoted passage, Foucault writes,

> The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and

> a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his [sic] total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away ... [t]he sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (43)

Coming-out narratives, and other lesbian autobiographical texts informed by identity politics produced a similar sexual subject. Lesbianism became a past, a childhood, a history, a type of life, a morphology. In these autobiographies, the narrators demand that sex speak truth, that it tell their "truth, or rather the deeply buried truth of that truth about [themselves] revealed and deciphered at last" (69).

Furthermore, this sexual subject of identity politics has been white. Women of colour have been critical of the politics that produce coming-out narratives, arguing that such reductive thinking ignores the multiple sites of oppression that women of colour are located within. Women of colour have challenged identity politics, enabled by what Chela Sandoval has called an oppositional consciousness. Teresa de Lauretis explains,

> ... the oppositional stance of women of color was markedly, if not exclusively, addressed to white women in the context of feminism -- that is to say, their critique addressed more directly white feminists than it did (white) patriarchal power structures, men of color, or even white women in general ... each of those oppositions remains present and active in feminist consciousness and ... must so remain in a feminist theory of the female-sexed or female-embodied

social subject. ("Upping" 265)

Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza presents us with a performance of an oppositional consciousness. "Borderlands," Anzaldúa tells us in the "Preface"

> are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.

Anzaldúa locates herself physically on the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border, and through metaphor, transforms that border into a psychic borderland the place of proximity and contradiction. She locates herself on the borders between many different discourses as well: as a "Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence)," Anzaldúa considers herself "alien" to both Anglo patriarchal and feminist discourses ("Preface"). As a "queer Mestiza," Anzaldúa is alien to her own culture. Her use of a "bastard language," a "switching of 'codes' from English to Castillian Spanish to the Northern Mexican dialect to Tex-Mex to a sprinkling of Nahuatl to a mixture of all these" again performs the very border consciousness that is to be the focus of her text ("Preface"). She not only examines the specific conditions of raced, gendered and sexed discursive identities, but she deconstructs the essentializing discourse of identity in and of itself. In other words, the narrator of this text refuses reductive, dualistic and essentializing ontologies by enacting a shifting and multiple oppositional consciousness, what Anzaldúa calls a mestiza consciousness. This allows her to trouble any given "identity" by simultaneously occupying the site of the "other" that such an identity is dependent upon for cohesion. The result is a powerful everyday account of the

condition of oppression **and** of resistance, as well as a new and provisional identity,

> ... I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings. (81)

The physical borderlands between the United States and Mexico, the space "where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds," has a long history of colonization (3). Our narrator uses what Sidonie Smith calls anamnesis, the recollection of a previous existence, in this case a "national" existence, to reinterpret history ("The Autobiographical Manifesto" 201). But she does not end there. Anzaldúa re-mixes two very powerful myths/legends in her culture: the figure of Coatlicue, and the story of La Chingada. La Chingada is a term that refers to a woman in Spanish/Mexican historical narrative known as Malintzin Tenepal. Malintzin was mistress to the Spanish conqueror of Mexico, and so is called La Chingada, or the fucked one, or La Vendida, a sell-out to the white race (Moraga "From a Long Line" 174). Malintzin was also sold into slavery by her mother, ushering in a long tradition of betrayal between mothers and daughters, as well as a tradition where women prove their loyalty to their heritage by privileging male approval above all else (Moraga "From a Long Line" 176). Coatlicue is a powerful figure or "archetype" that, as Anzaldúa notes, "depicts the contradictory" (47). Coatlicue, or the dark underworld, coexisted with Tonantsi, or the light or upper, as two aspects of an early Mesoamerican creator goddess known as Coatlalopeuh (Lugones "On Borderlands" 33). Coatlicue was driven underground with other powerful female deities by the male dominated Azteca-Mexica culture, and Tonantsi, split from her dark aspect, and became the good mother (Anzaldúa

27). The Spaniards and their Church, Anzaldúa tells us, also desexed them both (27). Our narrator rewrites the interpretation of the Spanish victory over the Aztec people: "thus the Aztec nation fell not because [Malintzin] (la Chingada) interpreted for and slept with Cortés, but because the ruling elite had subverted the solidarity between men and women and between noble and commoner" (34). Furthermore, Coatlicue, who has been split from Tonantsi, is re-configured by Anzaldúa as a symbol of ambivalence and duality:

> Simultaneously, depending on the person, she represents: duality in life, a synthesis of duality, and a third perspective - something more than mere duality or a synthesis of duality ... for me, la Coatlicue is the consuming internal whirlwind, the symbol of the underground aspects of the psyche ... In her figure, all the symbols important to the religion and philosophy of the Aztecs are integrated. Like Medusa, the Gorgon, she is a symbol of the fusion of opposites: the eagle and the serpent, heaven and the underworld, life and death, mobility and immobility, beauty and horror. (46-7)

By strategically complicating the histories and mythologies of the people who inhabit the borderlands, and by refusing to privilege gender over race, race over sexuality, or "fact" over myth, Anzaldúa is able to knead an empowering and transformative vision of hybridity.

The borderland culture is also the site of complicated biological, racial, ideological and linguistic cross-pollinizations that blur the lines between discrete racial or national identities. After the 16th century conquest by Cortés, a new race of mestizos was founded.

> The mestizos who were genetically equipped to survive smallpox, measles, and typhus ...

> founded a new hybrid race and inherited Central and South America. En 1521 nacio una nueva raza, el mestizo, el mexicano (people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood), a race that had never existed before. Chicanos, Mexican-Americans, are the offspring of those first matings. (5)

The borderland between Mexico and the United States is also the product of a long history of military, cultural and economic colonization by the United States. The result of both colonization and cross-pollinization is the complex blending of Spanish, Mexican and English languages that the narrator uses throughout her text.

> For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castillian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language? (55)

Nor do we see reductive sexual identities here. Rather, we have the coming together of opposites in strange doublings and mixed sexed and gendered subjects. "I made the choice to be queer," the narrator tells us, immediately countering that with its opposite, "(for some it is genetically inherent)" (19). The muchachas, or half and halfs, live their "inborn gift," not confused, but suffering within an ancient régime that demands either/or choices (19). Our narrator chooses to practice lesbianism, not to gain membership within yet another reductive category, but to deploy an oppositional consciousness that creates an intervention in the reproduction of the "feminine:"

> For the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is

> through her sexual behavior. She goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality ... [i]ts an interesting path, one that continually slips in and out of the white, the Catholic, the Mexican, the indigenous, the instincts. (19)

"The queer," we are told, "are the mirror reflecting the heterosexual tribe's fear: being different, being other ... and therefore sub-human, in-human, non-human" (18). Lesbianism is a site of resistance, not pure essence; discursive location, not fixed identity; Shadow-Beast, psychic fear, not pluralistic, alternative lifestyle (16). Above all, it is the sexual borderlands between genders and sexualities, a refusal of interpellation into either.

Finally, Anzaldúa refuses the rationalism that shores up western, humanist identities. The mestiza figure is one enabled by mind, body and spirit, one that refuses to be represented without "that other mode of consciousness" which "facilitates images from the soul and the unconscious through dreams and the imagination" (37). We see the narrator as "I, the singer" or storyteller, in a culture that "did not split the artistic from the functional, the sacred from the secular, art from everyday life" (66); and as shaman, building bridges between "evoked emotion and conscious knowledge" (69). Our narrator lives in the borderlands between physicality and spirituality, neither one nor the other, but both:

> My companion, a wooden serpent staff with feathers, is to my right while I ponder the ways metaphor and symbol concretize the spirit and etherealize the body ... [f]or only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed. (75)

Residency in the borderlands embodies the contradictions of being both whole, as hybrid, composite, hyphenated figure, and being multiple, shifting, fluid, situational:

> [t]his assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness -- a mestiza consciousness ... . (79-80)

I have been arguing here that the texts by both Schulman and Anzaldúa challenge the subject produced by lesbian-feminist identity politics. That subject is one that, in Sidonie Smith's terms, functions as "a locus of normative and exclusionary stabilizations of subjectivity that silence[d] marginalized peoples," under the larger aegis of white feminism (186). Both texts challenge the notion that sexual essence is the sole ground of autobiographical truth, and argue instead that what we know as sexual identity is the product of a complex discursive machinery producing and regulating sexual subjects since the 19th century. Finally, both deploy the category of identity in the service of a political praxis, without reinscribing the category "lesbian" within an essentializing rhetoric.

Furthermore, both of these texts challenge the very ground that the discourse of identity is constructed upon. Gloria Anzaldúa, as a strategy of empowerment, deploys a shifting, multiple and situational "I" in her text. She does not merely offer an alternate, but equally essentialized, identity; rather, she exposes the interdependent and inextricably bound nature of what appear to be self-contained and discrete identities. She deconstructs the oppositions between black and

white, colonized and colonizer, heterosexual and queer, and posits provisional identities that can function in the service of emancipatory politics while intervening in their treacherous predilection toward essentialism.

Schulman, on the other hand, deploys the discourse of psychoanalysis against itself to expose the meta-fictional nature of both sexed and gendered identities. The discourse of psychoanalysis has been instrumental in establishing the parameters of heterosexual/homosexual identities. Schulman returns to that site to undo and destabilize those categories and to show that neither sexed nor gendered identities are the ground of that discourse, but, rather, are produced as normative and regulatory categories by its operations. The naturalized lesbian subject of second wave feminism's identity politics attempted to challenge that regulation, but instead replaced the category with an equally normative and regulatory script. That subject is problematized and deconstructed in both of these texts, while keeping the category available for political praxis.

Part of the continuing political agenda within which Schulman and Anzaldúa's texts work has been yet another paradigmatic resignification of lesbianism, as well as the reconstitution of the notion of "communities" as sites of resistance. In chapter three, I will examine two texts that reconstruct a sexual lesbian subject through erotic photography. Della Grace's Love Bites (Britain) and Kiss and Tell's Drawing the Line (Canada) explore, manipulate and parody the anti-pornography condemnation of lesbian sex radicals and the cultural feminist desexualization of lesbianism, as well as the codes, conventions and modes of representation of heterosexual erotic imagery in order to represent lesbian sexual "identities." The resulting photographs reinscribe lesbianism as sexual desire between women both in, and outside of, heterosexual tropes. Each of

these texts constructs very different sexual subjects, a subject continually "in progress." Such "dykography" further deconstructs the premises that ground lesbian-feminist identity politics, positing a "queer" subject that promises to both politicize sexuality and sexualize political practice (Grover "Dykes in Context" 164).

III

"Dykography" As Parody: The Production of a (Lesbian) Sexual Subject

> *Perhaps if the phallocracy that reigns everywhere is put unblushingly on display, a different sexual economy may become possible?* (Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One 203)

> *"What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion."*(Oscar Wilde, The Letters of Oscar Wilde, as quoted by Dollimore 25)

In chapter two, I argued that two recent lesbian texts deconstruct the subject of second wave identity politics by deploying the "elsewhere" of that category, or "those other spaces both discursive and social that exist," against the category itself (de Lauretis "Technologies" 26). Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza challenges the covert racism of white feminism's identity politics. Sara Schulman explores the complexities of multiple sex and gender identifications and interrogates the psychoanalytic construction of lesbianism in her parodic "post-Freudian" novel Empathy. Both of these texts problematize and deconstruct lesbian identity while reinscribing a provisional identity for political praxis.

My reading of Schulman and Anzaldúa, however, makes apparent the fact that the deconstruction of identity through parody is not without its own internal tensions. Schulman's novel, in particular, reveals the paradox at the heart of

Butler's theory of gendered identity as parodic performance: if identity is exposed as an unstable discursive fiction and then provisionally reinscribed as a parody of those discourses, then the essentialized meanings associated with male and female identities are also reinscribed as part of what Linda Hutcheon has called the "bitextual synthesis" (33). In other words, parody as an overtly hybrid and double-voiced process depends upon and incorporates the "old," or the parodied or target, discourse while simultaneously critically distancing itself from it (33). In Empathy, "Doc's" identity as "male" has to be read against a backdrop of Anna O. as "female" in order for an essentially "male" or "female" identity to be "troubled" and denaturalized; and yet, those same essentialist meanings become reinscribed at the same time they are resisted. We can conclude for the moment then, that parody, defined as "repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity," and furthermore, as an "authorized transgression," is a complex meeting of two texts and/or discourses that is always already fraught with ambiguity, paradox and apparently self-evident contradiction (76).

In this chapter, I want to explore this "paradox of parody" in two collections of lesbian pornography which are, I will argue, re/producing a re-eroticized and doubly-constituted lesbian (meta-) identity. These collections, Love Bites and Drawing the Line, explore lesbian sexual practices by deploying tropes of lesbianism as gender transitive. By featuring the butch-femme "couple," or butch-femme roles as an ordering principle of this lesbian erotic system, many of these images enact Butler's understanding of identity as a parody of essentialized and naturalized heterosexualized and gendered identities. In her 1988 essay, "Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic," Sue-Ellen Case argues that a lesbian subject could render itself visible within feminism through the roles of butch and femme. Case asserts the need for the dynamic duo by situating her work where Teresa de Lauretis' ends. In

the first chapter of Technologies of Gender, de Lauretis argues that the subject of feminism is one who is "at the same time inside and outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so, conscious of that pull, that division, that doubled vision" (10). This feminist subject is inside and outside of the ideology of sexual difference and the institution of heterosexuality, is agential because she is newly perceived within a context of other women, and not in terms of men (Case "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" 56). Case argues that lesbian butch-femme roles offer precisely the strong subject position that feminism requires (57). Lesbians can inhabit this subject position as a coupled subject, and displace the concept of the female body, reified by the notion of sexual difference, because they "do not impale themselves on the poles of sexual difference or metaphysical values, but constantly seduce the sign system through flirtation and inconstancy into the light fondle of artifice, replacing the Lacanian slash with a lesbian bar" (57). They cannot be a split subject, "suffering the torments of dominant ideology," but rather, are a coupled subject, reminiscent of Monique Wittig's "j/e," or a coupled self (56). Terralee Bensinger argues that this parodic play on "bar" demarcates the signifier of (sexual) difference and the cultural context/space for the erotic play of difference(s) between women. Case concludes, "the female body, the male gaze, and the structures of realism are only sex toys for the butch-femme couple ... this is the atmosphere of [lesbian] camp, permeating the *mise-en-scène* with 'pure' artifice. In other words, a strategy of appearances replaces a claim to truth" (70).

However, this displacement of the concept of sexual difference, and denaturalization of the female body through the playful flirtations of the butch-femme couple is not without its own "trouble." In a dialogic response to Case, de Lauretis argues in a later work that, since "it takes two women, not one, to make a lesbian" ("Film and the Visible"

264), the femme of the butch/femme couple is visually unable to register in the hetero(hommo) sexual economy, because without a visibly butch escort, she would be reinscribed as straight ("Sexual (In)difference"). Her homosexuality would remain unseen or unrepresented. De Lauretis agrees with Case that the butch-femme couple cannot exist as two unified parts of a whole, and argues that they must be constituted as a dynamic couple in and through their setting. In the appropriate representational context, lesbian desire can be constructed, rehearsed, staged and played out through butch-femme roles. The butch-femme performance marks the displacement and reworking of dominant hetero-social tropes of desire, and subverts naturalized dominant meanings through the process of "transcontextualization" (Hutcheon 8-10). In other words, readings of texts which deploy tropes of lesbianism as gender transitive are entirely dependent upon context to foreground and render readable the previously invisible and unrepresentable.

In addition to representing lesbianism through tropes of gender transitivity, or the butch-femme couple, both of these collections "hijack" and parody the codes and conventions of mainstream heterosexual pornography to reinscribe a lesbian sexual subject who is both inside and outside of that same ideology. These codes and conventions are evoked and at once displaced by what Hutcheon calls "énonciation," or "the contexualized production and reception of parodic texts" (23). In other words, the conditions of representation are parodied and "transcontextualized," allowing for the production of "new" hybrid forms which call attention to, and immediately question, the very act of production itself (Hutcheon 8-10). The conditions of representation themselves are under scrutiny here, and since parody ("repetition with critical distance") is "overtly hybrid and doubly-voiced," so is the lesbian subject, an ambiguity already anticipated in Butler's theory:

> In a way, the presence of heterosexual constructs and positionalities in whatever form in gay and lesbian identities presupposes that there is a gay and lesbian repetition of straightness, a recapitulation of straightness -- which is itself a repetition and recapitulation of its own ideality -- within its own terms, a site in which all sorts of resignifying and parodic repetitions become possible. The parodic replication and resignification of heterosexual constructs within non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called original, but it shows that heterosexuality only constitutes itself as the original through a convincing act of repetition. The more that "act" is expropriated, the more the heterosexual claim to originality is exposed as illusory. (Butler "Imitation" 23)

Finally, this newly re-configured hybrid lesbian subject is re-eroticized. Lesbianism is provisionally reinscribed as a sexual relationship between women, and "sexuality" itself is denaturalized. These texts present the viewer with a complex view of sexuality as the transgressive imitation of discursive heterosexual practices, a "recapitulation," as it were, that at once imitates and displaces the heterosexualized scene. We do not see images of a "naturalized" lesbian sexuality, but rather we see the so-called "original" parodied through repetition with the critical distance that "marks difference rather than similarity."

I will conclude this chapter by arguing that the so-called "paradox of parody" is indeed not resolved in either of these texts. I will argue that this paradox, in fact, cannot be resolved. It is precisely the discontinuity between the foregrounded "text," or the performances of gendered identities, and the parodied background text, the essentialist meanings associated with gender, that allows the

performance, and indeed, all gendered identities, to be read as performance. The resulting disorientation and defamiliarization facilitates a comprehension of gender as no longer "fixed" in meaning. Hutcheon explains the importance and usefulness of "disorientation":

> Much parodic metafiction today deliberately works either to orient or to disorient the reader ... one of the effects of both kinds of maneuvering is to set up ... a "dialectical relationship between identification and distance which enlists the audience in contradiction" ... parody works to distance and, at the same time, to involve the reader in a participatory hermeneutic activity. (92, quoting Belsey)

The potential reinsciption of the essentialist meanings associated with gender may have to be risked in order to "trouble" those meanings and interrupt the repetitions that enable them. Since parody requires "a certain institutionalized set of values -- both aesthetic (generic) and social (ideological) -- in order to be understood" it cannot not exist without a minimal recapitulation of those values (Hutcheon 95). Without the paradox or the tensions between the "texts" that exists at the heart of parody, it cannot work, and will remain conservative in its actuality.

At this point, several important questions emerge. Why attempt to read lesbian pornography as parody? Why are lesbians making "pornographic" texts in such vast numbers in the first place, and why is there such an increasing demand for them? In addition, what is at work in these texts that makes them both popular and "trouble-making"? Furthermore, exactly what do we mean by the term "pornography"? Linda Williams asks similar questions of mainstream heterosexual pornography in her book Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the "Frenzy of the Visible" (1989), and

her conclusions are worth considering in this context. Williams begins her study of hard-core pornographic "stag" and feature-length films by interrogating the slipperiness of the term itself. Feminist and legal definitions of pornography, including the most recent Canadian Supreme Court ruling known as the "Butler Decision," define as "pornographic" and therefore "obscene" "any publication a dominant characteristic of which is the undue exploitation of sex, or of sex and any one or more of ... crime, horror, cruelty and violence."[1] The Canadian courts have attempted to formulate workable tests to determine when the "exploitation" of sex is "undue." The most important of these are the "community standard of tolerance test" and the test of "undue exploitation of sex." In brief, the "community standard of tolerance test" is premised on the belief that "there does exist in any community at all times ... a general instinctive sense of what is decent and what is indecent, of what is clean and what is dirty, and when the distinction has to be drawn ... [t]here are certain standards of decency which prevail in the community, [and] [w]hat is obscene is something which offends against those standards" ("R. v. Butler" 476). The test of "undue exploitation of sex" is based on a similar belief that "degrading or dehumanizing materials place women (and sometimes men) in positions of subordination, servile submission or humiliation ... consent cannot save materials that otherwise contain degrading or dehumanizing scenes. Sometimes the very appearance of consent makes the depicted acts even more degrading or dehumanizing" (479). If so-called "obscene" materials fail both of these tests, they are judged to "create a risk of harm to society" (455). The Butler decision therefore concludes that,

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[1]Section 163(8) of the Canadian Criminal Code. As quoted in "R. v. Butler" File No.: 22191, June 6, 1992. Canada Supreme Court Reports, Part 3, 1992, Volume 1. (Ottawa: Government of Canada Publications, 1992), pp. 452-526.

> Obscenity leads to many ills. Obscene materials convey a distorted image of human sexuality, by making public and open elements of human nature that are usually hidden behind a veil of modesty and privacy. These materials are often evidence of the commission of reprehensible actions in their making, and can induce attitudinal changes which may lead to abuse and harm. Harm in this context means that it predisposes persons to act in an anti-social manner, in other words, a manner which society formally recognizes as incompatible with its proper functioning. (455-57)

One of the major criticisms of the Butler decision and its harm-based definition of pornography and obscenity is, of course, its vagueness. In practice, the definitions of obscenity are left open to individual interpretation by police, Canadian and American customs officials, and lower courts.[2] The

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[2]In his "analytics of power," Foucault cautions us to move away from a "certain representation of power" that he terms "juridico-discursive" in favour of his reconcieved notion of discursive power as perversely implanting categories of sexual behavior that coalesce into identities (82). However, the Butler decision and its applications remind us that it is precisely such "juridico-discursive" power that overdetermines the specific experiences of individuals and texts in our culture. For example, after a five-day obscenity trial in December of 1992, Judge Claude Paris of the Ontario Provincial Court delivered a two-page decision on February 16th, 1993. In his ruling on one story, "Wanna My Fantasies" in one issue of Bad Attitude, a magazine of "lesbian erotic fiction" (Vol. 7, no. 4), Paris declared the magazine "obscene" under section 163(8) of the Criminal Code, the Supreme Court's Butler decision. That decision was based, in part, on a discursive alliance between LEAF (Women's Legal Education and Action Fund) and the Supreme Court to define and regulate the production and distrubution of pornography. Time and space prevent me from exploring the problematical premises of LEAF's action in detail, but I would like to make a few comments. The use of the Butler decision to seize and convict a lesbian magazine of obscenity in order to "protect" the general public reflects the danger of such legislation in a time when lesbian and gay cultures are invisible, not legally protected, and for the most part, viewed as always already obscene. Such a legal ruling does enable the mobilization of a reverse-discourse; however at a time when lesbian desire is invisible, at best, or erased under a "feminist" politics, its reconstitution as a site of homophobic fantasy is something LEAF needs to be accountable for. The Paris ruling indicates a desperate need to trouble the ontologies that ground feminist anti-

rhetoric of the Butler decision, signalled by its use of moral terms ("community standards," "decency," "degrading and dehumanizing," "anti-social ... behavior incompatible with society's proper functioning") as well as its naturalistic and essentialist views of sexuality (that pornography "conveys a distorted image of human sexuality, by making public and open elements of human nature that are usually hidden behind a veil of modesty and privacy") make it clear that it is an entirely inadequate source for a theoretical non-juridicial definition of "pornography." Furthermore, such "realist"

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pornography campaigns, and to re-think gender and class-based alliances with the police, customs officials and the Supreme Court. As Judith Butler notes, "it is one thing to be erased from discourse, and yet another to be present within discourse as an abiding falsehood" ("Imitation" 20). As a result of both the Butler and Paris decisions, lesbian and gay bookshops all across Canada have had (and continue to have) shipments of books from the United States seized at the border. In Edmonton, Woman-To-Woman Books has had not only its lesbian books seized, but also all copies of bell hooks, Black Looks, while West Edmonton Mall's Luv N Stuff receives its copies of The Joys of Masturbation and The Illustrated Guide to Forbidden Sex, both of which describe how men can simulate intercourse using the legs of a female infant (The Edmonton Journal, Tuesday, July 27, 1993, B2). Both of these books were deemed legal, and therefore, not obscene, by Canada Customs and by a police officer after a complaint by an employee at the store (Ibid). The passages in these books would clearly fail the Butler decision's "community tolerance" and "undue exploitation of sex" tests, and yet both were welcomed into the country without fanfare. The political implications of the Butler and Paris decisions for individuals is clear: because it is now a felony in Canada to fantasize participating in a lesbian sex act, these decisions inevitably alter the life and reception of texts which represent lesbian sex. The danger of the Butler decision is both the sorry discursive/political alliance which preceded it and the power it accords to Canada Customs to censor literature, film, photography and visual art, etc.. These dangers are becoming an ugly political and economic reality for artists and critics alike. Censorship in any shape or form is fundamentally dangerous and ineffective as the Love N Stuff incident indicates. Furthermore, legal discourse may act as a leveling or universalizing discourse in theory, but, in practice, bad laws such as the Butler ruling are inconsistently applied and are, as the morally panicked Paris ruling indicates, most vehemently used against visible "folk devils" while ignoring other more troubling and complex questions. I am indebted to Debra Shogan for an enriching conversation on the relationship between theories of discourse and power and constructs of "experience."

definitions, influenced by both the Canadian and American anti-pornography movements, suggest that an entire "truth" of sexuality actually exists outside of language, discourse and power. The framework I am using here suggests that images construct sexuality in and through their operations in language, discourse and power.

Williams looks at the work of two other theorists of pornography, Walter Kendrick and Beverly Brown and explores the definitions they propose.[3] Kendrick argues that pornography is simply whatever representations a particular dominant class or group does not want in the hands of another less dominant group (Williams 12). Quite simply, Kendrick suggests that those in power construct the definition of pornography by invoking the power to do just that. His definition is useful in that it examines the role of power in determining what is "pornographic" and clearly suggests that obscenity is not content-based but rather is a displacement of the social onto the sexual. However, his definition also ignores the specificities of heterosexualized and gendered meanings as they are represented, and indeed produced, in pornography.

Beverly Brown argues from a feminist perspective and suggests that pornography is "a coincidence of sexual phantasy, genre and culture in an erotic organization of visibility" (Williams 30). Williams, locating her own work within Brown's feminist scope and Michel Foucault's descriptions of power, pleasure and discourse, argues that since pornography, as a discourse of sexuality, constructs men and women and "sex," it is important to pay close attention to precisely how it works in order that it may be deconstructed

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[3]Walter Kendrick's The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture (as quoted in Williams, 12) and Beverly Brown's "A Feminist Interest in Pornography: Some Modest Proposals," in m/f 5/6: 5-18.

as well (55). Brown's definition of pornography is one that I too will use for my purposes here.

Williams argues that pornography participates in what Foucault has called "the modern compulsion to speak incessantly about sex" (Williams 2, citing Foucault's History of Sexuality 77). Foucault has argued that the pleasures of the body are subject to historically changing social conditions and that pleasures do not exist in an immutable opposition to a controlling and repressive power but instead are produced within configurations of discursive power that put particular pleasure to use. Williams argues that Foucault offers a particularly useful way of conceptualizing power and pleasure within the history of discourses of sex. Consequently, she asserts that pornography allows the viewer to satisfy his or her curiosity about sex directly by locating his or herself as invisible voyeur positioned to view the sex "act" itself rather than only hearing about it. With this satisfaction, comes an inevitable incitement to "know" that pleasure, as the "knowledge of pleasure," or the pleasure of knowing pleasure (Williams 3).

Williams considers pornography as one of the many forms of the "knowledge-pleasure" of sexuality. Influenced by Foucault, she traces the changing meaning and function of the genre in its specific, visual, cinematic form, and concludes that pornography seeks knowledge of the pleasures of sex and attempts to measure and represent that "truth" of sex by attempting to "know" the body as it is caught in the grips of the pleasure of sex (30). In other words, pornography attempts to make sex "speak" through the visual confession of bodily pleasures, promising to present visual evidence of the "thing" itself. In particular, it attempts to make the invisible pleasure of women manifestly visible in what Williams calls a "frenzy of the visible" (31). It is in this task of making the invisible visible that Williams locates pornography's place of

contradiction: in order to represent the "thing" itself, or the confession of the body in the grips of pleasure, pornography organizes itself around what Williams calls the "money shot," a close-up of penetration that shows that sexual activity and satisfaction is taking place (72-73). Williams explains:

> The "frenzy of the visible" in which contemporary sexual representations are caught is not inimical to women because it is explicit and visible, it is inimical to women because even its obsessive focus on the female body proves to be a narcissistic evasion of the feminine "other" deflected back to the masculine self ... Pornography is not phallic because it shows penises, it is phallic because in its exhibitions of penises it presumes to know, to possess an adequate expression of the truth of "sex" as if sex were as unitary as the phallus presumes itself to be. (267)

As such, the "frenzy of the visible" of pornography is not a self-evident truth but rather is a system of representation with its own history and its own historically changing gender relations. In effect, Williams argues that despite its claims to be a material and visible thing, pornography is still fundamentally a discourse, or a way of speaking about sex:

> [W]hat this new cinematic form of pornography **is** about is not only the multiplication of depictions of graphic sexual acts but also the conventionalized deployment of these acts within narratives that aim, as Foucault ... puts it, not just at "confessing" sex, but at "reconstructing, in and around the act ... the images, desires, modulations, and quality of the pleasure that animated it." In this intensification of pleasure in the very **knowledge** of pleasure, the hard-core narrative film resembles more "legitimate" recent deployments of sexuality, whether medical, sexological, or psychiatric. As in these other

> discourses, sexuality is constructed as a problem that a greater knowledge of sexuality will "solve" ... Of these discourses, pornography and sexology are the most alike in both purpose and narrative form. (151-52, quoting Foucault 77)

If pornography is a discourse or way of speaking about sex, then it comes as no surprise that the practices Foucault describes have operated more powerfully on the bodies of women rather than those of men. Williams acknowledges that women are not the true subjects of sexual art or sexual knowledge, but rather the objects exchanged in the generation of that knowledge (3). The pleasure of women is alien and other to the "two great procedures for producing the truth of sex" (57) described by Foucault, *ars erotica* and *scientia sexualis* (51-73). As we have already seen, this was, in part, the basis of the objections against pornography by the early anti-pornography movement described in Chapter One. Foucault has been criticized for failing to acknowledge women's subordination in that constitution of meaning and power in Western culture.[4] Nevertheless, if Williams is correct, as I suggest she is, pornography is another discursive way of speaking about sex. As such, it is possible to ask, "If power is constituted at the moment that woman is made the object of discursive sexual knowledge, then what happens if that same discourse, which is the site of what Foucault has identified as a machinery of power producing and implanting perversions and identities, is occupied and turned back upon itself by the very "other" it is dependent upon? Furthermore, if pornography, as the conjoining of "sexual phantasy, genre and culture in an erotic organization of visibility" represents another discursive attempt to make "sex speak," then what exactly is it that lesbian pornography is trying to "speak?" Williams, echoing Foucault's own work on the source of

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[4]Williams cites Bartky (1990), Sawicki (1991) and Martin (1982) among others.

resistance, answers my question, and suggests new ways of re-visioning the production of lesbian pornography:

> The proliferation of warring discourses of sexuality, creating sexuality as an object not only of pleasure but of knowledge as well, increases the ways in which power controls the life and the body ... But at the same time that power itself emerges, so does resistance to that power, and this too occurs in discourse. (86)

It is clear then, that lesbian pornography, in dialogic engagement with both mainstream, heterosexual pornography **and** the feminist anti-pornography movement is one such site of discursive resistance and intervention. In its critique of cultural feminism's assertions that sexuality and its representations ultimately victimize women, and second wave feminism's early constructions of lesbianism as "asexual," lesbian pornography, enabled by an oppositional consciousness which, as we saw in Chapter Two, is a stance addressed not so much to patriarchal and heterosexual power structures as a whole, but rather, to women in the context of feminism, speaks of a paradigm shift in both the politics of representation and the practice of identity politics. Parodying the erotic photograph as a way of making its "elsewhere" visible, the images represented in these two lesbian texts code their own representational (or butch-femme) history while putting the political and discursive economies "unblushingly on display," at once "jamming" and hijacking the "theoretical machinery itself, suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that [is] excessively univocal" (Irigaray 78). The result is a very "different" and hybridized sexual economy.

Della Grace's collection of photographs Love Bites originated in 1988 as the series (included in Love Bites) called "The Ceremony" (Schulman "Della Grace" 4-5). Since that time,

Della Grace, sometimes known as "Della Disgrace," has published her work in a wide range of American and British gay and lesbian magazines. After the publication of Love Bites, Grace went on to produce a magazine of lesbian erotic photography from London known simply as Quim: For Dykes of All Sexual Persuasions.[5] It is clear even from a cursory glance at Love Bites that Grace deviates widely from the "positive images" school of lesbian representation; consequently, her work raises many of the same questions I have been asking here. In particular, Grace's work allows us to examine more closely what happens when lesbians are behind and in front of both the camera and the images produced.

What Grace does in Love Bites is to create a startling collection of photographs that "trouble" notions of any sexed or gendered identity as fixed, unitary or stable. "The Ceremony," for instance, parodies typical family photos that attempt to capture and "mark" momentous occasions. In this series we see a "butch" bridegroom, and "femme" bride, celebrating what appears to be a wedding ceremony. The topless groom, wearing a leather harness, leather wristband, studded belt, leather cap and shaved head, embraces her bride, who is adorned with a studded wrist bracelet, earrings, bodice, lipstick, black latex gloves and delicate white wedding veil over her head (43-49). They are removed from what would appear to be a typical "picturesque" wedding scene, and are, instead, perched high on top of a roof overlooking a residential cityscape. Towards the end of the series, we see, as Schulman notes, a "sleepily satiated groom holding onto her lover with an expression of sexual contentment" (5). Likewise, the bride holds the groom in a pose of excitement and pride. Both bride and groom are captured in a parodic rapturous moment.

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[5]London, 1992.

The gender of the groom is also manipulated to reveal what we have been calling the "paradox of parody." In the first photo, the groom stands behind the bride. The only adornment marking the body of the groom as "female" is a double women's symbol tattooed onto her exposed arm. In the next photo, the bride's arm hides almost all of our "groom's" breast, and a cursory glance might not notice her breast at all. Toward the end of the series, however, our groom is captured in a pose with arms flexing upward, breasts (and gender) fully exposed.

The scene changes dramatically however in the last shot of the series. In this photo, we see our previous bride and groom both dressed in studded belts, leather jackets, harnesses, and handcuffs, on top of the same roof, but now the previous "bride" holds one fist playfully up to the chin of the previous "groom" (49). The effect is startling as the parodic wedding scene is dramatically transformed into one of playful aggression between two butch women. The faces of the "performers" are the same, but the text of the photo is dramatically altered. As the previous bride and groom celebrate their parodic ceremony, this photo reminds us that the entire scene was constructed, staged and fictional, as indeed, most wedding portraits usually are.

Finally, "The Ceremony" reminds us of the iconography not only of cultural performances such as weddings, but of the entire terrain of identity itself. As lesbianism occurs within a field of signification, these photos interact to create a parodic and hybrid image. The tattooed double women's symbol on the "groom's" arm in the first photo, suggests "lesbian," or what Hutcheon might call the foregrounded text, but the actual image itself, that of an obvious "bride" in a wedding veil accompanied by an unmarked groom (no visual markers of gender) suggests a heterosexual wedding, or what might called the background or parodied text. The bride or "femme"

of the "dynamic duo," is a far more ambiguous figure than the groom, and reads as heterosexual until the groom is revealed as butch/female. The two sub-texts, as it were, compete for prominence throughout the series, defamiliarizing and disorienting both the informed reader (a reader who could read both the double women's symbol and the lesbian context of the text itself, signalled by the authorial dedication, "Dedicated to Sylvia Elizabeth MacFarlane in love and lust") and the uninformed, or resisting (a reader who might only wish to engage heterosexuality's most conspicuous sign: the wedding). The end result is a process where identity, male or female, lesbian or straight, and butch or femme is provisionally established and then immediately called into question.

Other series in Love Bites also establish identities and then immediately call them into question. The "Posers" captures the variety of images we might see in a fashion or sports magazines. We see the "Boxer," topless and unmarked in the first photo, in a pose that might not seem out of place in Sports Illustrated, or on the sports page of a newspaper (10-11). But here that context is at once evoked and displaced by the location of the two photos next to each other and in a collection of lesbian photographs. She is clearly marked as "female" in the second photo as she challenges the gaze of the viewer in a muscle -- and breast -- revealing pose.

Furthermore, the placement of these photos next to each other also demonstrates the "paradox of parody." In the first photo, the boxer's arms are crossed over her chest, hiding her breasts. Since she is topless and wearing boxing gloves, the text suggests she could be "male." The second photo disrupts that possible meaning as her exposed breasts now mark her as "female." Consequently, the meanings in the second photo associating "breasts" with "femininity" are a necessary part of how the implied "masculinity," or lack of breasts in the first

photo, is disrupted. In addition, Grace has reversed the colours of the backdrops of each photo to add to the disorientation; a pink backdrop frames the "male" image, while a blue backdrop decontextualizes the "female." The photos work in dialogue together, with each deconstructing the scaffolding that shores up the gender meanings implied by the other. Consequently, both the essentialist meanings associated with gender, that masculinity and femininity are determined by biological differences, and lesbianism as the parodic "troubling" of that discourse, are necessary components of how this photo works as parody.

"Permission to Play" along with "Ruff Sex" are perhaps the most disturbing and (gender-) "troubling" of all the series in Love Bites. In particular, the first three photos of "Permission to Play," do play with gender as "the female body, the male gaze and the structures of realism become sex toys" for the butch-femme couples. The first photo shows a femme dressed in the signifiers of "femininity": high heels, stockings, garter belt, and bodice (33). She is standing outside what appears to be a stone fence and gate. An artificial rat sits on the gate-post to the right of the femme, enhancing the artifice and fictionality of the scene. Finally, our femme, who in Butler's terms, is already imitating a feminine identity, is holding an artificial phallus up against her crotch. She looks directly into the camera with a mischievous look of defiance, as if she is enjoying "catching" and disorienting the viewer. There is no sense that she is actually the bearer of the phallus but instead she presents a complicated hybrid image that parodies the artifice and iconography of both genders as represented in heterosexual pornography.

The location of these photographs, outside of a broken down stone fence and gate, enhances both the "out/law" status of our "dynamic duo," and their identities as "fallen women." Lynda Nead has argued that Pre-Raphaelite painters like D. G.

Rossetti drew upon a number of conventions to represent sexual deviancy (129-134). Nead argues that Rossetti's 1857 watercolour called *The Gates of Memory* depicts a prostitute standing under an archway enclosed by brick walls and buildings which declare the bleak, urban setting of the scene (129). In his picture the definition of sexual deviancy is displaced from the representation of physical appearance to the representation of location. Furthermore, the sign which Rossetti depends upon most fully for his representation of the prostitute is the rat which is seen at the woman's feet, disappearing into a drain. The woman's identity as a fallen woman and prostitute is constructed by activating the language of city waste, pollution and infection. The rat, as a carrier of disease, the link between the sewer or underground and the city, functions as "an index of the woman's moral and sexual identity" (129).

Both location and the rat in Grace's parodic photograph function in much the same way. The broken down fence and gate speak of decay and a bleak landscape as well as unstable or crumbling social boundaries. The figure here is placed outside of the gate to suggest "otherness" while the obvious "toy" rat enhances the fictionality of the scene. The rat here is not placed down at the woman's feet near the drain where "it can disappear into a drain and come up anywhere," but rather is placed at the edge of the broken down gate itself (Nead 130). In the third photograph ("1989") it has disappeared altogether, as if it, much like the figures depicted in Grace's photographs, is both inside and outside of these "carefully-constructed spaces and social boundaries" (Nead 130). Finally both the rat and the lesbian subject of these images can pass through the decaying, archaic and crumbling social boundaries symbolized by the fence.[6]

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[6]Thanks to Dr. Shirley Neuman for drawing my attention to Nead's work.

The following two photographs continue to "play" with both the roles of butch and femme, and the conventions of heterosexual pornography. The positions of butch-femme become interchangeable: in the first photo, the figure who appears to be butch is shown wearing a harness and dog collar, and is in a subservient posture to her very pleased femme (34); the next image reverses those positions as the femme is now bound and performing oral sex, or what Williams calls "the money shot," on the same hyperbolical phallus she used in the first photo (35). The penetrative pose parodies the money shot in heterosexual pornography as the fake and hyper-real phallus represents the "frenzy of the visible," or the body supposedly gripped in a spasm of "naturalized" pleasure. The irony of the parody here is, of course, that this larger-than-life phallus is always "hard," presumably even when it sits in a box in the closet, and as we have seen, is completely interchangeable between butch and femme as a sex toy. The phallus, which has come to signify ontological, naturalized and transcendental gender truths in both feminist and patriarchal economies, was, in this age of late capitalism, simply purchased in a store. The phallic claims to ontological and essentialist truths in heterosexual pornography are parodied and disrupted here by what Sue-Ellen Case calls a "strategy of appearances ... the atmosphere of [lesbian] camp, [which] permeat[s] the mise-en-scéne with 'pure' artifice" ("Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" 70).

The s/m and meta-phallic content of these last two photos continues to be "put unblushingly on display" in the series "Ruff Sex" (51-55). In the first photograph, "Romantic Bone 1988," we see a femme standing behind her "phallically abundant" butch (51). Both women are dressed in the signifiers of s/m sex: dog collars, wrist bands, latex gloves, black leather pants and captain's hat, etc. The femme's hands

rest in a tender pose on her butch's shoulders, as the "tough" butch looks away from the camera. The femme meets the viewer's gaze head on. The three photos that follow represent what appears to be a rape scene. The femme is aggressively held down by our former "groom" and penetrated from behind by her butch (52-54). There can be little doubt for me that these are the most disturbing of all the photographs. However, as Schulman notes in her introduction, the second photograph is mildly tinted, and consequently, the eye of the viewer travels from the red lips of the femme to the red nail polish and bracelet of the "butch" behind her (5). The photograph gives contradictory clues as to what is occurring. The phallus and aggression of the two butches signifies "rape" but the nail polish on the first butch disrupts her identity as "rapist" while the tattooed double women's symbol on the second, indicates "lesbian," and, traditionally, a non-aggressive sexuality. Consequently, the images are coded with their own internal tension which makes any definitive reading impossible.

Furthermore, the scene represented in these photographs is coded with all of the paraphernalia and iconography of lesbian s/m. Williams, in her study of s/m in heterosexual pornography suggests that s/m represents "not the extremity of the violence enacted or endured for obtaining pleasure but rather [it signals] the way in which violence, aggression and pain become vehicles for other things -- for staging dramas, of suspense, supplication, abandon and relief that enhance ... sexual acts" (195). Lesbian s/m has become a vehicle for attempting to reveal not the "frenzy of the visible," as Williams suggests, but rather, the "frenzy of the invisible," or that discursive power which constructed lesbian s/m as its own necessary "other." Williams argues that s/m offers a "clear confrontation with the oscillating poles of gendered identities and with the role of power in them," power, which as Foucault demonstrates, is itself coded in its own discursive

operations.[7] If s/m is about something else, as Grace's photographs suggest, it is ultimately about making that discursive power visible. Initially, its opponents such as Linden et al, read s/m as representing male-identified rapaciousness, where one individual, presumably male, dominates and abuses another, presumably female. However, a closer look reveals that lesbian s/m here foregrounds that same discursive power that overdetermines sexual identities. Foucault explains,

> Sexuality must not be described as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity disobedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it and often fails to control it entirely. It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power ... [s]exuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality; useful for the greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin for the most varied strategies. (103)

Lesbian s/m, as represented in Grace's photographs, strategically appropriates discursive power as its own erotic

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[7]Williams 228. Foucault 93-95: "The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. And "Power," insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement. One needs to be nominalistic, no doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society ... [w]here there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power ... Their [power relationships'] existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance ... these points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network."

point of resistance to a plethora of discourses which enhanced its "out/law" status by condemning its existence: cultural feminism, which desexualized lesbianism for political purposes, and then condemned sex radicals, and heterosexual pornography, which manipulates lesbianism for its own purposes. Consequently, lesbian s/m as represented here hijacks the productive technology, and then parodies it by thematizing power as its vehicle for erotic intensification, visibility and defiance. One s/m lesbian, a "bottom," interviewed in Quim spoke of her anger and defiance as it is reflected in her clothing. When asked about her high heeled shoes, she noted, "Some people say they used to put out the message "fuck me." For me, they mean "fuck you" (12). What is exchanged in the "especially dense transfer point" of lesbian pornography, especially in representations of s/m and butch-femme practices, is the discursive and political will to resist and transgress sexual boundaries that have inscribed them as feminism's necessary "Other."

As we saw in Chapter One, the sex debates, and lesbian s/m in particular, were the primum mobile of the Vancouver show Drawing the Line as well. Vancouver's artist collective Kiss and Tell, made up of Susan Stewart, photographer in collaboration with Persimmon Blackbridge and Lizard Jones, created Drawing the Line to engage many of the same issues that Grace's photographs do. The exhibit was put together in response to the sex debates as they appeared in Vancouver. The photographs are organized from least to most controversial and represent a wide variety of lesbian sexual practices, including butch-femme practices, cross-dressing and s/m. The show itself is transformed into an installation as women are invited to interact with the photographs by writing their comments around, and sometimes, on, the photos themselves. The result is a powerful, cacophonous performance of discursive voices that destabilizes any and all

constructions of the lesbian subject of the photograph, as stable, unified and fixed in meaning.

In the same way that Gloria Anzaldúa and Sara Schulman deconstructed the subject of second wave identity politics by deploying the "elsewhere" of that category, or the other discursive and social spaces that exist, against the category itself, Drawing the Line, as a photography exhibit, facilitates a similar deconstruction by deploying its own "elsewhere," or the discourses which preceded its inception and its viewing, in its performative re-construction of a provisional lesbian identity. And in much the same way that Anzaldúa's text continually assumes identities and then immediately calls them into question, Drawing the Line, because it depends upon viewer interaction for completion, enacts the very same process. The comments surrounding the photographs are the site of a vertiginous reverse-discourse as the viewers comment on both the images and other viewers' comments about what the images do and don't mean about lesbian identity.

The comments that I read while the show appeared in Edmonton indicate a readiness to continually occupy the subject position "othered" by various viewers' comments.[8] For example, in one photograph, a model is represented as tearing the T-shirt of the other to reveal her breast. One viewer wrote, "Showing only one part of her body like this objectifies women." Another viewer responded by writing, "Objectify me baby!" In yet another instance, the photograph showed two women having sex with a third. One viewer wrote, "A woman being done to," as if to suggest the third woman was an unwilling participant. A different viewer wrote in response, "Do me!" A third photograph shows the two models kissing

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[8]I owe a debt to Persimmon Blackbridge who has been observing this trend everywhere the show has travelled, and who generously shared her observations in a conversation over lunch.

while wearing false mustaches. One viewer wrote, "Why do lesbians have to imitate men like this? Why do we have to repeat these tired old stereotypes?", while another rather observant viewer challenged the essentialism of the first viewer, "Hey, my momma has a mustache!" The comments continued in this fashion until, by the end of the show, the viewers' texts illustrated the impossibility of articulating a single notion of lesbian subjectivity.

Like Grace's photographs, the images in Drawing the Line represent lesbian sex as occurring not only in private, but also in back alleys, bathrooms, garages, bars, rooftops and other unconventional settings. For instance, there are several photographs representing two women having sex in a bathroom stall. Some viewers seem to enjoy the transgressive nature of lesbians having sex in public. Other viewers objected to images of lesbians having sex in public places. In both cases, the viewers project their values, beliefs and assumptions about both sex and gender onto the photographs. Once again, these values are often quickly challenged, "Where is she when I am in the can?" (Kiss and Tell).

Both butch-femme and s/m practices are represented in these photographs, and these are the images that tended to generate the most commentary. One series of photographs shows a woman cross-dressed. Her hair is combed back and is slick looking, while her heavily painted lips occupy the centre of the photograph. Her "butchness" clashes with her heavily made-up face. Another photograph shows one of the models wearing a huge false mustache, bowler hat and black lace bodice. Her long hair protrudes out from under her hat, and her black intense eyes look directly back at the camera. Another photograph shows a butch seated on a motorcycle, with a dildo visible in her lap. The second model stands beside her, fondling the phallus. Finally, two photographs show a woman blindfolded and completely bound with a thick rope,

breasts and labia exposed in the second. All of these images represent the more controversial practices condemned by the sex debates. Once again, the various attempts to articulate the definitive meanings of these lesbian practices are continually disrupted by viewers' comments. About the mustache and bowler hat: "I like the playfulness of this gender-fuck," and "No, too scary. This is a real turn-off to me" and "Butch or femme. You decide" (Kiss and Tell). About the "butch" with combed back hair and make-up: "Is sex an attitude?" and "Woman playing with her own gender/sexuality. Pretty powerful stuff" (Kiss and Tell). Finally, about the woman blindfolded and bound: "I find the first [photograph] compelling, the second upsetting," and "I was sexually abused as a kid. I grew up doing s/m. I was acting out what was done to my body as a child. I didn't know anything else," and in a lighter note, "She's weaning herself off *Days of our Lives* . (Don't laugh, I've been there.)" (Kiss and Tell).

Above all else, Drawing the Line disrupts the ontological realism associated with photography. Photographs are perhaps the most disrupting when they are clearly a constructed image that tells us that the models were present and performed the acts represented. However, the photographs in this show also reveal the mediated nature of all representations, which often "forget" as much as they "remember" (Grover "Framing the Questions" 184-90). Kiss and Tell chose to use the same two models throughout the show to facilitate discussion on what the models were representing rather than on what they looked like. The limited number of models means lesbians of colours are "forgotten" in this show. This is perhaps one of its greatest theoretical limitations. Nonetheless, as Jan Zita Grover remarks since "photographs usually function not as reflections of reality at all but as alternatives/enhancements to it: fulfillments of wishes, idealised models, what ... might [be] termed 'subjunctive images' -- photographs hurled toward the

future cast ahead of us as visual guideposts to what we hope to become," Drawing the Line remains useful to illustrate my point that lesbian pornography attempts to make sex "remember," and hence "speak" the conditions of its existence ("Framing the Questions" 185).

Despite the differing and often competing discourses on lesbianism that are engaged in Drawing the Line, there are a number of important conclusions about lesbian identity and lesbian pornography that are signalled by the "visual guideposts" in photography shows such as Drawing the Line and Love Bites. I have been arguing here that lesbian pornography shares with heterosexuality a desire to make "sex" speak. The re-visioning of lesbian identity in both of these texts suggests a move toward redefining lesbianism as a provisional sexual activity, if not, identity. What "qualifies" as "lesbian sex" is still open for debate. Nonetheless, lesbianism is being reconfigured as a sexual practice, and no longer merely as a political ideal shared amongst women.

Secondly, even though both of these texts share a desire to disrupt the practice of lesbian feminist identity politics, they both, paradoxically, retain the identity category itself for political praxis. The fact that both Drawing the Line and Love Bites reinscribe lesbianism as a provisional identity indicates that there is something politically valuable and necessary about that category. I suggest that the identity "lesbian" is being re-eroticized, and that in that re-eroticization, there is a desire to make "sex" speak the conditions that produce sexual identities in the first place. In other words, as we have seen, these photographs speak about the conditions of representation themselves that construct normative sexual practices around both "absences" and "presences." Lesbian pornography, as an absent "elsewhere" of the machinery producing and regulating heterosexuality as the normative, "natural" and original sexual identity, is "speaking" about both

its own conditions of existence, and the larger phallocratic economy which produces sexed and gendered identities in general.

Conclusion

In Chapter One we saw how the sex debates problematized the subject constructed by the practice of second wave feminist identity politics. Judith Butler argued that instead of reading that subject as a unified, fixed and ontologically coherent subject, we view all identities as a parody of that same essentializing discourse that produced the post-enlightenment Western "man." Furthermore, Butler suggests that gay and lesbian practices which deploy gendered exchanges of desire, such as butch-femme practices, drag and cross-dressing, be read as a parody of the idea of heterosexuality as the original sexual identity. Such a practice can only reveal homosexuality as heterosexuality's necessary "other."

Chapter Two demonstrated the ways in which contemporary lesbian fiction, by two writers in particular, is deconstructing the lesbian subject by deploying the "elsewhere" of that identity against itself. In that chapter, we saw that parody, as an authorized transgression, is structured by a paradox: parody often reinscribes the same institutionalized values, discourses or texts it critiques while, at the same time, attempting to distance itself from them.

In Chapter Three we examined this 'paradox of parody" more closely in lesbian pornographic texts which deploy tropes of lesbianism as gender transitive to parody both the conditions of representation themselves and the machinery producing heterosexuality as the "original" identity. I argued that the paradox of parody as it manifests itself in shows like Love Bites and Drawing the Line needs to risk reinscribing essentialist discourses in order to simultaneously distance themselves from them. These texts "trouble" the subject of

second wave lesbian feminist identity politics and then reconstitute a provisional lesbian identity each and every time they are circulated or viewed. The multiple discourses that shape lesbian identity, including both lesbian feminist identity politics and heterosexual biological determinism, are parodied and defamiliarized by the wide range of different sexual practices that are spoken as "lesbian." Consequently, Drawing the Line in particular reinscribes a provisional and re-eroticized lesbian meta-identity organized around the very concept of difference itself.

Lesbian meta-identity is strategically and provisionally politicized and eroticized, not as a fixed identity, but as strategically transgressive activity. The sign itself is deployed in political praxis, but is left available for what Judith Butler suggests is "a future set of significations that those of us who use it now might not be able to foresee. It is in the safeguarding of the future of the political signifiers - preserving the signifier as a site of rearticulation - that ... [we can] discern its democratic promise" ("Imitation" 19). Preserving this particular signifier as a site of rearticulation provides the only promise of a continued political existence as well. Nicole Brossard reminds us of the political importance of reinvention: "A lesbian who does not reinvent the wor[l]d is a lesbian in the process of disappearing" (122, 136).

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